UNDERSTANDING REALITY TELEVISION: A TRIANGULATED ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES, CHARACTERISTICS AND ONTOLOGY OF REALITY TELEVISION PROGRAMMING

By

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By

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WHAT IS REALITY TELEVISION?
A TRIANGULATED ANALYSIS

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Reality television has recently experienced a surge in programming and viewership. Networks are prolifically creating reality shows because they are much less expensive than their fictional counterparts. In addition, reality programs are capturing high viewing audiences for low production costs. Viewers flock to reality programs because they seem to offer something different from the standard television fare of sitcoms and dramas. As a result, reality television has left an indelible mark on popular culture.

Along with its growth in programming and ratings, the range of what is being labeled "reality TV" has become divergent and unwieldy. The genre of reality television seems to be expanding, encompassing many different shows. Thus, it is essential, at this developmental stage, to explore what reality television truly is. This study examines how academics, viewers and media producers and

professionals understand, interpret and characterize reality television. It asks how separate, but integral elements of the reality television process—the media producer/professional, the viewer and the academic—think about the development, production techniques and characteristics of reality television programming.

The current study offers a triangulated analysis, using multiple sources and multiple methods. First, a textual analysis was conducted to discover how academics understand and critically evaluate reality programming. Second, focus groups with viewers were conducted to grasp how viewers interpret and categorize reality television. Finally, in-depth interviews and a document analysis were completed with media producers and professionals working with reality programming content to discover how they examine and portray reality programming.

In general, academics, viewers, media producers and professionals agree that reality programs contain the following characteristics: no script, real people, and real, unrehearsed reactions to some event or situation. All three groups acknowledged that production techniques are used to enhance the viewing experience; however, no one believed that they were used to an extent that influenced or manipulated the participants of reality programming. Thus, the present study helps clarify how different media users understand reality television programming.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

> The monstrous thing is not that men have created roses out of this dung heap, but that, for some reason or other, they should *want* roses. For some reason or other man looks for the miracle, and to accomplish it he will wade through blood. He will debauch himself to a shadow if for only one second of his life he can close his eyes to the hideousness of reality.
>
> Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*

Introduction, Background and Significance of Study

Miller might be amazed to discover that today a growing number of people not only *willingly*, but fervently open their eyes to the "hideousness of reality" by watching hours of reality television programming. While still in its toddler stages of development, reality television programming glimmers on nearly every network and cable channel and in every timeslot, including primetime. Reality television programming first whetted the public's appetite with *America's Most Wanted*, *Unsolved Mysteries* and *Cops*. Their popularity gave way to a glut of reality television programs, all attempting to feed the viewing public's taste for real "caught-on-tape" drama. "Like a rockslide that snowballs into an avalanche," reports Dempsey, "the volume of reality shows on television has multiplied exponentially over the last few years, to the point where the shows now saturate network primetime, first-run syndication and cable TV schedules" (1991, p. 32). Moreover, so many different types of shows are being labeled "reality television" that the array of reality programming has become unwieldy. Glance at a *TV*

Guide and you will notice the new programming trend taking place. For example, here is a short list of just some of the self-proclaimed reality programs that have (or will soon) come to life:

Real TV	*Cops*	*Diary*
A Wedding Story	*Temptation Island*	*Truth*
A Baby's Story	*A Dating Story*	*EcoChallenge*
A Makeover Story	*Real World*	*Rescue 911*
Road Rules	*Making the Video*	*Close Call*
Making the Band	*Big Brother*	*Combat Mission*
Paramedic	*Break In*	*Spy TV*
American High	*1900 House*	*Love Cruise*
Hollywood Nights	*Fear*	*Road Rage*
Fanatic	*Blind Date*	*Manhunt*
Hopkins 24/7	*Band on the Run*	*Popstars*
Taxi Cab Confessions	*Trading Spaces*	*Sweet Revenge*
Survivor	*Surprise Weddings*	*The Mole*
Jackass	*World's Most Amazing Videos*	*Jailbreak*
Now or Neverland	*Operation/Destination Mir*	*The Runner*
Boot Camp	*I Do, I Don't Wed at First Sight*	*Fanatic*
Chains of Love	*America's Scariest Places*	*Amazing Race*
Global Adventure	*Trauma: Life in the E.R.*	*Fear Factor*
Real People TV	*Castaway (Real.com/castaway)*	

A burgeoning number of network and cable channels are scrambling to create and fill their airtime with reality programming. In fact, one cable outlet, The Learning Channel (TLC), broadcasts exclusively reality programming, calling their brand of shows "Television unscripted." The incredible surge in the production of reality television programs is surpassed only by the growth of its viewers.

The latest boom in reality programming, offering shows with an Orwellian 1984 flare like *Big Brother* and *Survivor*, was engendered in Europe. Gauging from their immense popularity in Europe, CBS bet they would have "no trouble finding an audience" in the States (Streisand, 2000, p. 50). Even so, Leslie Moonves, chairperson of CBS, admitted that "huge ratings for *Big Brother* and *Survivor* in the Netherlands and Spain" does not guarantee success in the U.S. market (Zurawik, 2000, p. E1). One thing going for CBS and other networks now scampering to produce *Big Brother* and *Survivor* spin-offs is cost. More and more networks are producing fewer "big science-fiction projects" like *The X-Files* or "huge ensemble cast shows" like *Friends* ("Economic Reality Programming" 1991, p.29). Instead, networks are opting for reality programming "mainly because an hour-long reality series typically costs about $500,000 an episode, only half of what the networks pay in license fees for an 60-minute dramatic series" (Dempsey, 1991, p. 32).

According to Leslie Moonves, the president of CBS and person responsible for putting *Survivor* on the air, more networks are turning toward event-centered television programming, in which every week some major

incident occurs that audiences believe they cannot miss (Carter, 2000, p. 3). CBS's precarious feat as the first major network to devote a large chunk of its primetime to unscripted series programming has paid off in a big way. *Survivor* on CBS has enjoyed the most recent and largest audience of any reality television program with an estimated high of 51 million viewers ("*Survivor* Tops" 2000, p. e1). In fact, *Survivor* consistently beat other top-rated shows, like *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, by as much as 63% among the coveted 18-49 demographic group, giving CBS its best ratings in that adult segment in over seven years ("*Survivor* Sets" 2000). Thus, reality programs are capturing ratings that were once possessed solely by dramatic series, sit-coms or sporting events.

While primetime reality programming is a new venture for the big three networks, cable channels have been in the real TV business for a few years. For example, The Learning Channel (TLC) offers shows like *A Dating Story*, *A Wedding Story* and *A Baby's Story* during the day and *Trauma: Life in the E.R.* and *Paramedics* in the evening. According to Chuck Gingold, TLC's programming chief, the "ratings are near-phenomenal, especially for young women" (Span, 1999, p. A01). The Learning Channel uses reality television's popularity in its latest promotional spot. In it, TLC asks the viewer: "Are you human?" The viewer of course answers: "Yes." TLC responds: "TLC-Human TV," equating the very essence of what it means to be human with its reality programming. Thus, reality television is for everyone, and everyone seems to be watching it.

According to Kilborn:

> [T]elevision audiences have acquired a seemingly insatiable appetite for 'real-life' programming in whatever format this may be presented. At the same time, however, one cannot deny that audiences—particularly in these postmodernist times—have become increasingly sophisticated in their relations with the television medium. Nowadays, viewers are much more aware that what is seen on the screen is in every sense a constructed reality. (1994, p 422)

Reality programming is a new, growing trend in both programming and viewership. Questions about the nature of reality television and its connection to truth as well as queries about the ethical nature of the programs and their content abound in both the research and popular literature. In addition, the genre of reality television seems to be expanding, encompassing many different shows. Thus, it is essential, at this developmental stage, to examine how academics, viewers and producers understand, interpret and characterize "reality programming."

Statement of Purpose and Exploratory Questions Guiding Study

With so many shows offering a slice of reality via the tube and millions of viewers tuning in to eat it up, it is intriguing to consider just *how* viewers, academics and the media industry examine and understand reality television programming. That is, how do three separate, but integral, elements of the reality television process—the producer, the consumer and the academic—think about reality television? Why do viewers flock to these programs in record numbers? How does reality television differ from its fictional counterparts and from earlier reality-type programs? What are some of the production techniques

of reality programming and how do they differ from non-reality shows? Do viewers recognize the production values of reality programming and how might these production techniques affect the "realness" of the program? Given that reality television is a produce television commodity, do viewers, academics and media producers and professional believe it is possible to have "real" reality television? If not, then what is it people mean when they label a show "reality TV"? And finally, does one's unique interpretation of reality, their ontological position, affect how the characterize reality television programming?

Much research has been conducted on the effects and content of reality television programming, especially how children view these shows (Davies, 1997; Krug, 1993; Howard, 1993). However, little to no research has investigated the queries above. The current study will examine (1) reality television's growth and development into the highly popular televisual form it is today; (2) the production techniques of reality television, how they differ from fictional shows and what viewers, academics and media professionals and producers think about them; (3) the "realness" factor of reality television—is reality television really real and if not then what does the label "reality television" truly mean to these three groups of media users (academics, viewers and media professionals and producers); (4) how people's personal interpretation of reality affect their notion of what is reality television. Appendix A provides a complete list of the research questions guiding the current study.

By gaining insight into how these three separate yet integral parts of the process interpret reality programming, a deep and rich understanding of the

phenomena under study will be developed. It should be noted that the present study is not interested in creating a universal interpretation of reality television. The complex and rich nature of the subject at hand does not favor such a goal. Rather, the present study aims at creating understanding, grasping the essence and characteristics of programming that has been labeled "reality TV" during recent years.

Reality television programming has become the most popular genre on television, in both ratings and growth in programming (Leopold, 2001; Streisand 2001). Robert Thompson, director of Syracuse University's Center for the Study of Popular Television, asserts that reality television has moved beyond the trend stage and has reach the status of being a form (Leopold 2001, p. 1). In fact, Thompson doubts "you, me, our children or our grandchildren will know a time without" reality television. Thus, its incredible growth and seemingly cemented rooting within our popular culture make reality television worthy of analysis. However, the special ethical and epistemic stance of reality television also makes the form worthy of academic study.

Reality television uses real people, playing themselves and not characters. As a result, audiences view reality television differently than other programs. If the public, after viewing carefully edited snippets of content, believes that a particular person on a reality show is a bad person, their ethical evaluation of that person extends *outside* of the parameters of the show. That is, viewers believe that character X truly is a bad person, not that he is just playing a bad person on television.[1]

Finally, reality television also carries a unique epistemic stance. Because the subjects are real people playing themselves, not character roles, audiences are justified in placing higher epistemic weight in their knowledge claims about the people portrayed in reality television programs than in their fictional counterparts. That is, because character X is being him or herself and not some character, viewers can be more confident that the traits and personality they are learning about by watching a reality program are accurate. In fact, several reality shows, including *Survivor* and *The Mole*, build on the epistemic strength by quizzing the contestants and viewers about the true nature of the players. One might counter that producers of fictional series might also quiz their viewers about the "true" nature of their fictional characters; however, what sets reality television apart is that the nature of the characters is not created by the producers. The people in a reality series are reacting spontaneously to the events they encounter, allowing their characters to emerge and be analyzed by the producers and audiences.

Thus, there are many interesting ethical and epistemological queries surrounding reality television programming. However, before researchers can begin to effectively analyze some of the questions surrounding reality television, the form itself must examined to understand its roots, its development, growth, production techniques and characteristics. Therefore, the present study is needed to lay some explicative groundwork on the popular and burgeoning "network crack" called "reality television" (Streisand 2001, p.36).

This study will answer the questions above in several steps. First, a review of the relevant literature will provide some prefatory understanding of reality television's roots in documentary and non-fiction programming, social construction of reality and the development of reality programming and its different sub-genres. Next, a textual analysis will give insight into how academics examine, evaluate and categorize reality programming. Third, focus groups with viewers reveal their experiences with reality programming and how they interpret, analyze and differentiate reality television. Fourth, document analysis and in-depth interviews with media and industry professionals who work with reality programming content uncover how they create, explore and characterize reality programming. Finally, the results of the literature review, focus groups, document analysis and in-depth interviews are triangulated to create a deep understanding of the growth, development, production, realness, ontology and characteristics of reality programming.

This research uncovers how several different groups of media users think about reality television. As the surge in reality programming and viewership continues to mushroom, a proliferation in research will undoubtedly follow. Therefore, the current analysis will serve as a seminal piece, which future studies of reality television are sure to build on.

Theoretical Framework Guiding the Study

The current analysis is guided by the substantive theory of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism serves as a guide in discovering how

meanings and ideas about the reality television shows are created through the use of symbols. According to Blumer, symbolic interactionism:

> . . . does not regard meaning as emanating from the intrinsic makeup of the thing that has meaning, nor does it see meaning as arising through a coalescence of psychological elements in the person. Instead, it sees meaning as arising in the process of interaction between people. The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing. Their actions operate to define the thing for the person. Thus, symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact. This point of view gives symbolic interactionism a very distinctive position, with profound implications. (1969, pp. 4-5)

The symbolic interactionist's view of meanings, namely as socially constructed realities, corresponds with the present analysis because it investigates how different groups of adult media users create their interpretations of reality programming through their interactions with each other and the content. Thus, symbolic interactionism is used to examine agents' interaction with the televisual medium, their culture, and the responses, meanings and beliefs developed from television viewing and socially constructed values.

Holstein and Gubrium recount that there are two branches of symbolic interactionist thought:

> Over the years, two streams of symbolic interactionist thinking—the so-called Chicago and Iowa schools—took this in different directions. Blumer (1969), who taught at the University of Chicago, became the central figure of the more process-oriented Chicago school, while Manford Kuhn (1960, 1964) and his associates . . . at the University of Iowa were the leading proponents of the more structured Iowa school. (2000, p. 32)

The present analysis embraces Blumer's Chicago-style symbolic interactionism because we are primarily interested in the process, the *how*, of meaning creation.

That is, the present study attempts to understand *how* individuals create meaning and understanding, how they critically analyze and interpret reality programming, as well as *how* these interpretations are affected by other social factors like textual interactions, community, culture and the self.

Blumer asserts that symbolic interactionism "rests on three simple premises":

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.

Whatever those "things" may be, tables, persons, or representations via the television, the meaning one ascribes to those things comes from what those things mean to that individual, not in the things themselves.

2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.

People are not islands. Humans do not stand alone in their interactions and meaning creation. An essential component to the meaning creation process is one's interaction not only with the things, but with one's social system—friends, family, culture, organizations, work—all play a role in shaping how one acts toward things. Mead describes the social self:

> The unity and structure of the complete self reflects the unity and structure of the social process as a whole; and each of the elementary selves of which it is composed reflects the unity and structure of one of the various aspects of that process in which the individual is implicated. In other words, the various elementary selves which constitute, or are organized into, a complete self are the various aspects of the structure of that complete self answering to the various aspects of the structure of the social process as a whole; the structure of the complete self is thus a reflection of the complete social process. The organization and unification of a

> social group is identical with the organization and unification of any one of the selves arising within the social process in which that group is engaged, or which it is carrying on. (cited in Morris, 1967, p. 144)

Thus, in order to discover how one creates meaning and interacts with reality television programming, not only must the individual be examined, but also the social structures to which that individual belongs. Because people are social creatures who create meaning through their social interactions with other beings, it is imperative that one of the current study's data collection methods, the focus group, examines *how* meaning is derived through participant interactions. Finally, Blumer's third and final premise for symbolic interactionism states:

3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969, p. 2).

This meaning making process is continual. That is, human beings do not simply interpret meaning for a particular thing and move on. Instead, they revisit that thing, their interpretation, and how it fits within their worldview and adjust their interpretative meanings accordingly. Holstein and Gubrium contend that Blumer is cautioning us in this third premise:

> The caution is explicitly directed at those symbolic interactionists who, while they would accept the first two premises, are remiss on the third, employing highly structured methods that don't permit the interpretive process to continually show through. Blumer urges us to view the human being in social interaction as incessantly involved in meaning-making. The methodological directive here is to document the articulation and emergence of meaning in rich detail as it unfolds, not in lifeless analytic categories and statistical tables. (2000, p 33)

Thus, the meanings we will examine concerning adult media users' notions of reality television are not set in stone. They are focused, in-depth, and enriching accounts of how three separate, but integral components of the media chain view reality television programming. In the following section, it will become clear that to interpret some permanent definitional fixture out of the current analysis would be stretching the scope of the current study outside its intended boundaries.

Scope of the Study

As with any study, it is important to recognize the inherent and unique scope of the present qualitative inquiry. Knowing exactly what this analysis does and does not reveal about reality television helps prevent confusions about the boundaries of the data discussed. As such, the scope of the current study is idiographic in nature. While the "richness of the particular elements" documented here may be "generalized to other cases of the same problem in the larger culture," the intended scope of the present analysis is not universal law (Lindlof, 1995, p. 57). Thus, it would be inappropriate to apply and extrapolate the findings of this study to one universal population. The purpose is to provide a rich yet focused and preliminary discussion of reality television. To critique or extrapolate more out of this study would be a misinterpretation of the merits of qualitative research.

Note

[1] One can see this extension of ethical evaluations to fictional characters, especially with soap opera characters; however, what is important to notice here is that with reality television the viewers are somewhat justified in extending the ethical evaluation outside of the show, whereas with a soap opera character, the actor plays a scripted role that has no bearing on his or her true personality.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

> Reality TV lurches between actual situations and events of startling horror, intense danger, morbid conduct, desperate need, or bizarre coincidence (the raw) and cover stories that reduce such evidence to truism or platitudes (the cooked). (We might term this "the ideological reduction" of reality TV.) The startling or bizarre, desperate or intense, is given an offhand and commonsensical ring: "Isn't it incredible; life's like that (and you are there)." The strategies and effects are different from fiction, and different from the often no less bizarre and unsettling work of the avant-garde. Reality TV aspires to *non-fiction*. It reduces potential subversion and excess to a comestible glaze. (Nichols, 1994, p. 45)

As noted in Chapter 1, no research has been conducted on how academics, viewers and media producers and professionals examine and understand reality television. Therefore, the present investigation provides new insight in reality television research. The present study seeks to understand how academics, viewers and producers analyze and interpret reality television. The literature review serves as the first of three steps to grasp how adult media users understand and characterize reality television. Examining relevant research on reality programming and related areas provides a sound body of literature on which to build. In addition, reviewing the relevant literature also facilitates understanding of how researchers critically analyze, evaluate and classify reality programming and its close relatives, documentary and non-fiction programming.

It should be noted that reality television is, in part, a popular culture form. Moreover, reality television shows are growing in number and popularity faster

than academic journals can keep up. As a result, some of the articles reviewed here come from the popular culture sector. For example, articles reviewing, examining, or merely discussing *Survivor* the night after it was broadcast come from popular periodicals like *TV Guide Online*. Keep in mind that the majority of the research reviewed here stems from the academic sector; however, because of the nature of the medium and the timeliness of the programming, some of the information reviewed here comes from the popular culture sector.

Research covered in the present section is categorized into one of four broad sections. Chapter 2 begins by examining some of the historical foundations of documentary film and reality television, including their origins and various approaches. From there several theoretical and philosophical aspects of reality television programming, including the social construction and representation of reality, are presented. Next, the genre of reality programming, including its growth and development, economic advantages, and future trends is examined. Finally, research on the audience and participants of reality television programs, including some of the ethical and epistemological issues, parasocial and fanatical effects, and interactive/online opportunities unique to the medium, is analyzed.

Because "reality television" is a relatively new term in both popular and academic circles it is hardly surprising that little academic research has been specifically devoted to reality programming. Therefore, much of the historical background covered in the first section of the literature review stems from

documentary film theory. Keep in mind however that reality programming is a distinct art form, unique from documentary and non-fiction film.

Problems Interpreting and Characterizing Reality Programming

While many reality programs are not necessarily documentaries, both are equally challenging to interpret and characterize. Discovering the essence of what makes a reality program what it is or what constitutes a work as a documentary film is essential to understanding the text itself. Therefore, one must examine how reality television is interpreted in order to fully grasp what reality television is. Since there are no studies examining the essence of reality television, one must then look to its closest relatives, primarily documentary.

What constitutes a documentary film or reality program often depends on whom you ask. For example, producers of documentary will have a different viewpoint from critics of documentary. Similarly, viewers, untrained in professional production or critical skills, will perhaps value quite different characteristics than those of producers and critics. Kilborn and Izod explain the variety of characteristics attributed to documentary as follows:

> Producers of documentary will tend to take their cue from the broadcasting institutions who commission their work. Critics and reviewers on the other hand will be inclined to measure 'documentariness' in terms of a set of values and properties derived from a large body of (allegedly) documentary material, produced over several decades. And finally . . . viewers themselves will have their own ideas on what documentaries should deliver. In the case of television viewers, for instance, the defining qualities of documentary are likely to be determined by being measured against other types of broadcast output (news and current affairs programming) or set in contrast to the 'endless round of games and quiz shows which seem to dominate the schedules nowadays'. (1997, p. 13)

With so many perspectives to account for, deriving one list of necessary and sufficient conditions for "documentariness" is a daunting task indeed. It is also not surprising to find that "the label 'documentary' " or "reality TV" for that matter "is now attached to a much wider range of audio-visual material than when it began" (Kilborn, 1997, p. 13). As a result of so many programs being labeled "documentary" or "reality programming," a true sense of what it means for a program to be a *reality* program becomes clouded.

In addition to contextual problems when interpreting and characterizing reality programming, the content of the programs often adds several hazy pieces to the puzzle. According to Cavender and Fishman, "television reality programs are especially hard to categorize because they blur the line between news and entertainment; some even blur the line between fact and fiction" (1998, p. 3). As a result, television reality programs "are a hybrid form of programming: they resemble aspects of the news, but, like entertainment programs, they often air in prime time; some even show as reruns" (Cavender & Fishman, 1998, p. 3).

Some have attempted to bypass characterizing reality programming altogether. For example, Davies (1997) argues that a more "useful" way of looking at how children view reality is to ask them how seriously they take the information presented on the program . According to Davies, the "concept of taking something seriously avoids the existential difficulties of defining objective reality....What could matter most for children when they try to judge representations of the real world, whether on television or anywhere else, is not how literally true to life these representations are, but how authentic they are

perceived to be in addressing children's own concerns and preoccupations" (1997, p. 22). Some similar comments were mirrored in the preliminary focus group. In general, participants thought that shows using outrageous people and their equally outrageous situations as subject matter were not believable (Joniak, 1999). One participant remarked:

> JV: I take everything I watch on television with a grain of salt because anyone can spin around a story to make you think a certain way and it's up to the person to be able to select what's important and what's not and to make his own decision not necessarily take the point of view the person presented . . . (Joniak, 1999)

Thus, viewing reality programming requires the viewer to actively judge the believability and decide for herself whether or not the program accords with her own view of reality.

Despite the difficulties, some general characteristics of documentary and reality television have been discussed in the literature. Cavender and Fishman (1998) state a basic and reoccurring characteristic found in reality programming, namely, that they claim to present reality.[1] Similarly, Fiske and Hartley assert that reality television claims that its symbols are authentic significations of objects (1992, p. 164). That is, the image presented on the screen is the *signifier* for the referent or the *signified*, which resides in the actual world (Fiske & Hartley, 1992, p. 38). For example, a strip of film that projects the image of Hillary Clinton is the signifier for the real Hillary Clinton. In other words, Hillary Clinton is the signified and the filmic representation of Hillary Clinton is the signifier. Thus, a television program that shows the signifier of Hillary Clinton and claims it as the true referent for the signified (Hillary Clinton herself) is reality television. Fiske and

Hartley argue that reality television programs are not natural documents of events (Fiske & Hartley, 1992, pp. 38 & 165). Editing, music, voice-over narration, commercials, and sound/image sweetening of the raw footage affect the accuracy of signification (Rush, 1990, p. 5).[2]

Ponech argues for a liberal definition of non-fiction film, even arguing that a "wholly non-fictional motion picture need not be wholly factual" (1999, p. 8).[3] In fact, Ponech asserts that a non-fiction film need not satisfy what he refers to as the aboutness condition. That is, according to Ponech, a non-fiction film's subject need not correspond to anything "actual or factual" in the "extra-cinematic reality" (1999, p. 9). So, what does a film need to do in order for Ponech to consider it a non-fiction film? Ponech presents the following necessary and sufficient condition:

> A cinematic work is non-fiction if and only if its maker so makes it. A documentary motion picture, then, is simply one that results from the filmmaker having been directly guided by a particular purpose, namely, an intention to produce non-fiction.
> I argue that the core of non-fiction consists not of an objective indicator relation, but of an **action** of indication, that is, somebody deliberately and openly indicating something to somebody else. Here the definition of non-fiction makes decisive reference to the nature of filmmakers' intentions. Documentaries acquire their status as such because they are conceived, created, shown, and used with certain definitive communicative purposes in mind. They are cinematic assertions; and naturally meaningful images are among the elements frequently employed by the communicator toward assertive ends. (1999, p. 8, 11)

Thus, according to Ponech, the intentions of the filmmaker to create a work of non-fiction are a necessary element in order for that cinematic text to be considered "non-fiction." Ponech's definition of non-fiction may be flawed in at least two ways. First, the intent of the filmmaker, while important, is by no means a *necessary* condition for a film to be categorized as non-fiction. If a class of third

graders were given video cameras and instructed to go out and shoot something, some will undoubtedly come back with interesting compilations of their everyday world. Those real life snippets constitute non-fiction, regardless of the eight year-olds' intentions (and it is doubtful that they held *any* intentions toward their cinematic text to begin with).[4] Thus, the filmmaker's overt intentions to create a work of non-fiction are not a necessary condition in order for us to consider the work non-fiction.

Second, the fact that one intends for his work to be considered non-fiction is not sufficient for it to be regarded as non-fiction. For example, an individual who is deluded or mentally deficient in some other fashion *intends* to create a work of non-fiction on the existence of extra-terrestrial life forms. This delusional filmmaker videotapes what he truly takes to be UFO's; however, it is clear to us and everyone else that the "UFO's" are merely twin-engine prop planes coming in for a landing at nearby airport. While we might find the delusional filmmaker's "documentation" of UFO's entertaining, few would venture to say that it is what the filmmaker *intends* for it to be, namely, a non-fiction film proving the existence of UFO's. Now, we may say that the film *is* a non-fiction film, but not on UFO's. Rather, it is a non-fiction film on twin-engine prop planes. Notice though that our categorization of the film as a non-fiction text on twin engine planes is made *independent of* the filmmaker's intentions. In fact, our classification counters the filmmaker's motives. Therefore, the filmmaker's intentions are not a sufficient condition for us to consider the cinematic work as non-fiction.

British documentarist John Grierson, often refereed to as the father of documentary film, characterized documentary as the "creative treatment of actuality" (Barsam, 1992, p. 89). According to Barsam, Grierson "realized that the state could use film and other media to control and manipulate the audience" and as such, Grierson produced films that not only educated audiences, but also praised and illuminated the "human condition" (Barsam, 1992, p. 89). For Grierson, the promotion of social causes trumped any aesthetic aspirations in documentary film (Barsam, 1992, p. 80). Thus, an important characteristic of documentary film is that it not only educates, but goes a step further to socially enlighten audiences.

Barnouw (1974) builds his notion of documentary by combining Grierson's "creative treatment of actuality" and Vertov's "fragments of actuality" definitions. As a result, Barnouw contends that documentary serves two equally important functions: (1) documenting (via recording images and sounds); and (2) interpretation (1974, p. 287). Thus, documentary documents "actuality," that is, actual persons, places and events. However, documentarists are selective in what "fragments" they chose to shoot. In addition, the "treatment" or interpretation documentarist put on the actuality they shoot also, according to Barnouw, requires the documentarist to make subjective choices. Subjectivity is yet another issue of contention within documentary film, which will be discussed later on in this chapter.

In sum, characterizing documentary film, non-fiction film and reality television programming is a challenging endeavor. What one builds into the

notion of documentary or non-fiction or reality programming is tricky. Contextual issues must be clarified. Intent of the producer and manipulations (e.g. editing) must also be taken into consideration. In addition, analysis of how the filmic representations of subjects become signifiers for referents must be examined. As the content of reality programming, or at least what is being fashionably labeled as "reality TV" expands the need to understand and characterize the genre becomes greater.

In the 1980s reality television shows were categorized vaguely as "non-fiction" or "documentary;" however, these terms are too broad and restrictive, respectively. Using the term "non-fiction" is too broad because it says nothing about the referent, namely, reality (other than it is not fictitious). In addition, the preliminary content analysis and focus group interview revealed that all reality television programming contains some element of entertainment, which is neither a sufficient or necessary condition for a non-fiction program. The term "documentary" does not fit reality television programming because many reality television shows are not constrained by the exact standards of documentary filmmaking. Some argue that the reality presented on reality television programs is as much created as it is captured, which is often an undesirable, if not totally unacceptable, element in purist documentary filmmaking.

Despite their incongruities, given the genuine gap in the literature, most of the knowledge reviewed in the historical section of the literature review describes traditional non-fiction or documentary programs. It is the author's expectation that future research on reality television programming will not need to borrow

from other disciplines, like documentary film, but will refer to its own body of literature. To that end, the current analysis proffers some of the definitional, historical, theoretical, descriptive and normative groundwork needed for future academic enterprises.

Historical Foundations

Reality television programming has roots in documentary film. The first reality programs, like *An American Family*, were more or less made-for-television documentaries. Therefore, in order for us to study the genealogy of reality programming, we must begin by examining the development of documentary film and the two primary approaches of the documentary tradition. From there, we will examine the beginnings of reality programming on television and its connection with documentary film.

Documentary film was born out of still photography. Still photography was seen as a scientific marvel, a means of scientific data collecting and epistemic certainty. Both still photography and documentary film were first regarded as scientific and technological achievements, not as artistic tools. Remarking on photography as a means of capturing and discovering reality, Alan Trachtenberg asserts:

> Photography denotes a process of *making meaning* through pictures. By the 1890s, this cultural process had infiltrated the entire society, establishing itself as perhaps the prime arbiter of "reality." . . . .The photograph does compel its viewer to contemplate what seems an authentic token of reality, teaching viewers to read signs of life in black and white . . . .More intensely and urgently than in the past, to see became to know—or to hope to know. (Barsam, 1992, p. 9)

Thus, photographs became the best, most reliable method for documenting reality. In addition, the realist movement in 19th Century art awakened the

aesthetic component of still and moving photography. Realist painters like Monet, Degas, Courber, and Manet inspired the first cinematographers to record "the visible facts of people, places and social life, for a growing middle-class audience" (Barsam, 1992, p. 14). Since its arrival, cinematography has been utilized by scientists, anthropologists, ethnographers and artists as a tool for capturing real, everyday events. According to Barsam:

> Before narrative, sound, or color, the initial impulse of the first cinema artists was to record commonplace reality. How appropriate and natural, then, that the Lumière brothers should turn their cameras to making what they called *actualités,* or documentary views, of such ordinary subjects as a boat leaving a port, blacksmiths at work, a family at play, or military processions. (1992, pp. 15-16)

The artists' desire to create actualités of everyday, commonplace events and people, instead of fictional, scripted dramas was brought to fruition by numerous technological developments.

Technological developments

Prior to still photography, if people wanted to document an event they could rely only on their memory and ability to draw pictures of the event. Prior to motion pictures, it was impossible to record live action. Still photographs gave only bits and pieces of an event. In addition, with the advent of synchronous sound, one could document the visuals *and* sound of a particular setting. Thus, advancements in the tools we use to record daily life have made the documentarist's desires to create actualités come to life.

Four stages of technological development have occurred during the last century that have significantly advanced the growth of documentary film and reality programming. First, was the development of moving photographs and

synchronous sound as new tools for capturing reality.[5] The motion picture camera surpassed the flawed and limited human eye. Thus, the development of moving pictures brought us closer to 'truth' than ever before. Dziga Vertov, a Russian filmmaker and creator of the *kino-pravda* or as it is now known as the cinéma vérité approach, wrote about the technological marvels of cinematography and how it, unlike the human eye, has the capacity to cement our epistemic footing in the creation of documented reality (Barsam, 1992; Barnouw, 1983). Barnouw offers a snippet of Vertov's writing in his manifesto, also entitled *Kino-Pravda*, where Vertov espouses the merits of the "superhuman versatility of the film camera":

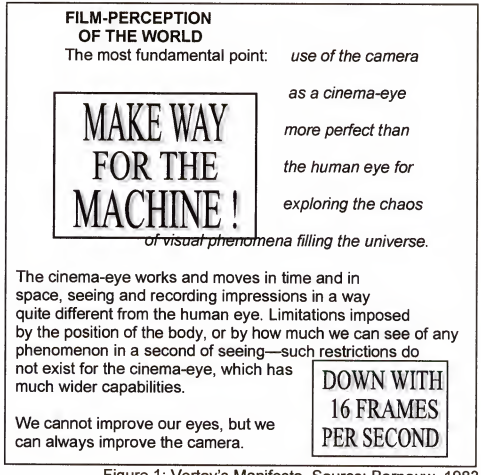

Figure 1: Vertov's Manifesto, Source: Barnouw, 1983, p. 58

More from Vertov, quoted in Barnouw:

> . . . I am cinema-eye—I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you a world such as only I can see.
>
> From now on and for always I cast off human immobility, I move constantly, I approach and pull away from objects, I creep under them, I leap onto them, I move alongside the mouth of a galloping horse, I cut into a crowd, I run before charging troops, I turn on my back, I take off with an airplane, I fall and rise with falling and rising bodies.
>
> Freed from the tyranny of 16-17 images per second, freed from the framework of space and time, I coordinate any and all points of the universe, wherever I may record them.
>
> My mission is the creation of a new perception of the world. Thus I decipher in a new way a world unknown to you. (1983, pp. 57-58)

It is perhaps difficult to appreciate how remarkable moving film was to those who before could *only* rely on the human eye for representations of reality. The advent of motion pictures allowed cinematographers to record actualités in their entirety. Audiences, who had never seen anything like it before, marveled at the movement of film. Barsam remarks on how audiences reacted to the first motion picture films:

> For us today these films are documents in cinema history and records of historical reality. But those first audiences, unaware of the cinema history that was to come, must have had a different reaction: delighted by the recognition of the familiar; intrigued, perhaps bewildered, by the unfamiliar; frightened, even, because of the size and immediacy of the image. Most of all, however, they were enthralled by the movement; indeed, once they had accepted the movement *per se*, they were ready for anything. (1992, p. 22)

The first motion picture audiences often reacted to the filmic images with amazement and even fright. For example, when the Lumière brothers premiered *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* in 1895, which shows a train coming towards the camera, the audience was so taken with the size, motion and believability of

the image "that some people, imagining that the train was going to come right out of the screen, drew back while others reportedly ran to the back of the room in fright" (Barsam, 1992, p. 3).

Figure 2: *Arrival of a Train at la Ciotat,* Auguste & Louis Lumière, France, 1895; Source: Barsam, 1983, p. 4

When synchronous sound was developed in the late 1920s, audiences were able to eavesdrop on the conversations of filmed subjects and enjoy the natural cadence of the city streets and other sounds (Dirks, 1996). Until synchronous sound, audiences had to read the dialogue spoken, which, of course, excluded a large portion of Americans who could not read. In addition, the music that previously served as the sole audible accompaniment was replaced by affirming natural sound, voice and song. Most importantly, attaching an audible element to their visual cue enhanced the authenticity of the filmatic experience for viewers.

In the 1960s portable synchronous sound freed the filmmaker even more. According to Barsam (1994), the "use of transistors reduced the weight of the tape recorder from several hundred pounds to only twenty" (p. 302). Portable synchronous sound allowed filmmakers to follow the action anywhere and record the voices, natural sounds and other ambient elements missed before with heavy, cumbersome equipment.

Motion pictures and synchronous sound allow filmmakers to record events taking place before them; however, the equipment was often bulky making movement of the equipment difficult (Barsam, 1992). In addition, film, cameras and film processing was (and remains) expensive, restricting its use to the upper class (Winston, 1995). Ironically, even though the camera possessed the ability to record movement, it was somewhat bound physically (Barnouw, 1983). Also, despite the initial yearnings to document simple everyday events and people, the cost of making films excluded the very class of people who served as the primary subjects of the first actualités (Winston, 1995). Of course all that changed with the advent of video.

The birth of video marked a new age in documentary expression. Video offered several practical advantages over its filmatic counterpart, not the least being its ease of use and cost. Barnouw describes the influence and advantages of early video on documentary programming:

> In the 1970s the base of documentary activity was dramatically broadened by the rise of *video*—a term that began to be applied to the use of videotape as a new medium of expression....Simpler equipment and falling prices gradually enabled some educational institutions and individuals to buy [video cameras] . . . . Then the advent of compact video cameras and editing equipment, easy to operate and moderate in cost,

> brought videotape into a new arena. These cameras...apparently enabled almost anyone to make brilliant images. These required no laboratory processing—the images could be evaluated instantly. In most cases no special lighting was needed. Unlike film, tape could be reused; low in cost, tape for the small video cameras could be expended almost as freely as a novelist uses paper. A single individual could now be a production unit. Videotape. . . became a canvas for independent work—video. (1983, pp. 286-287)

Video opened the world of naturalism and documentary to a new amateur audience. Families recorded the remarkable as well as the routine experiences of their development. In addition, for the first time, the simplicity of the video camera allowed children to document the world from *their* unique perspective, "a practice never advocated in previous discourse on amateur film, where fathers controlled the means of production and family representation" (Zimmermann, 1995, p. 153). Thus, video empowers the amateur documentarist to capture and create her own documented world.

The power of video and the amateur videographer is ardently illustrated by what has come to be known as "The Rodney King Trial" (Nichols, 1994). On March 3, 1991, the Los Angeles Police apprehended Rodney King after a high-speed car chase. In the process of subduing and arresting Mr. King, a gang of officers severely beat him. Unbeknownst to the police officers and King at the time, the event was being videotaped by a bystander. Unbeknownst to the bystander, the videotape he was creating became the key piece of evidence for the police department, the plaintiff (Mr. King), and a nation, who used the documented beating as a universal referent for race relations in the United States.

In his book *Blurred Boundaries*, Nichols devotes a chapter to the Rodney King video. In particular, Nichols examines the indexical properties of this videoed event and how the nation transformed a singular recorded act into a symbolic referent for race relations and police brutality. Speaking about the power this amateur video had, Nichols asserts:

> This raw, crude footage in which a man is being beaten carries an indexical whammy. . . . This footage of King is the raw to reality TV's cooked. It is rebuked, not companion, to the simulacrum. The relation of signifier to referent cannot be displaced by endless chains of signifiers and the signifieds we forge to accompany them. We wince, we gasp; we experience this brutal event with moral outrage. Representations of violence often have this effect. They cry out for response; they retain the power to produce visceral effect. This is even more true when what we see, the imagistic signifiers, bear an indexical relation to an event that occurred before the camera that we take to be a historical event, not a staged, scripted, or reenacted one. (1994, pp. 18-19)

The footage of the Rodney King beating was replayed on every major television network and cable outlet. It was also used, effectively, by the Los Angeles Police Department to rebut accusations of police brutality. When the LAPD was found not guilty on all but one of the charges, the video again was played on major news outlets as a visual contradiction to the judicial outcome. Riots in Los Angeles broke out, as a culture reacted to what they perceived to be flagrant misuse of the judicial system (Nichols, 1994). Thus, the impact from this historical event documented on a cheap, transportable video camera, operated by an ordinary citizen shows the authority of reality captured on video.

While video technology allows anyone to become a videographer and capture events anywhere, digital technology allows the audience to view programming anywhere, anytime and have control over their viewing experience and content. According to Mark Cuban, co-founder and president of

broadcast.com, "Any day now people will use their computers to watch television, buy merchandise from their favorite shows and even send feedback to producers or advertisers" (Mifflin, 1999, p. C8). "The upshot of new technology," Andrew Shapiro argues, "seems to be its ability to put individuals in charge" (1999, p. 11). As such, the Internet hands the controls over to the users, allowing them to select what programming they want to watch and when they want to watch it.

Moreover, Internet broadcasting, or Webcasting as it is commonly referred, gives viewers a chance to interact with the content (Tedesco, 1996, p. 52; Gallo, 1999, p. 17). For example, CBS and AOL (America Online) host the *Big Brother* website. *Big Brother* is a reality television show that takes 10 carefully selected individuals and puts them in a house, shut off from all elements of the outside world, for three continuous months. The house is equipped with nearly 40 cameras, recording their every movement and utterance. The goal for the 10 houseguests is to avoid being evicted from the house.

The *Big Brother* website acts as a companion source for the television program, offering viewers more than the traditional television broadcast can give in its limited airtime. The website allows viewers to watch the houseguests 24 hours a day, seven days a week, uncensored.[6] In addition to their voyeuristic boon, viewers also get to decide who is "banished" from the house. Finally, viewers are given the ultimate power of choosing who wins the $500,000 grand prize (*Big Brother*, 2000). Thus, the Internet, Webcasting and digital video allow reality television programming to be viewed outside the traditional medium. Moreover, in an interesting and ironic twist, new technologies allow viewers to

actually alter the reality they are viewing, giving them control not only over when and how they view reality, but over reality itself.

The ease and seemlessness of digital manipulation has revived skepticism over the photographic image's authenticity of accurately signifying the referent. Winston uses several examples of photographic manipulation that occurred decades before digital manipulation was possible, reinforcing the importance of reevaluating our common dogmatic acceptance of the photograph as sufficient epistemic evidence. Winston argues for a "continuum of authenticity":

> There is, in fact, within any one photographic image a 'continuum of authenticity'—if you will—a complex range of relationships with the real world depending in different ways and different degrees on the plastic materials and action within the frame as well as the manipulations and interventions of the photographer. Understanding these relationships depends as much on the contextual inferential walks taken by the deconstructing viewer as on anything within the frame. As a result, photographic images in general can only be considered as evidence of the real world in limited and complex ways—more limited and more complex than we commonly allow. . . . We must finally acknowledge the photographer [or the documentary filmmaker or reality television producer] as a subjective presence even while the science of his or her camera allows us to continue to test, in a qualitative way, for authenticity. (1998, pp. 66-67)

Part of the present analysis examines how different media users critically examine reality television's authenticity.[7] In addition, the current research looks at the different "range of relationships" and how these different relations to a common text affect their interpretations of that text.

In sum, the motion picture camera, synchronous sound, video and digital technologies and the Internet have changed how we interact, document and observe the world around us. However, despite the technological advancements

throughout the past century, our yearning to tell real, human sagas remains unchanged. Like the realist movement in art and the beginnings of documentary film, television has come full circle by offering televisual realities, featuring the lives of ordinary people and their extraordinary life stories.

However, *how* those life stories are told remains in a paradigmatic pit of contention. It is a familiar debate surrounding the metaphysical, phenomenological and epistemological nature of reality. One camp endorsing the existence of a singular objective reality and the other embracing the subjectivity of reality and exploiting its unique nature through carefully crafted interpretation. One can find these two opposing philosophies in virtually every artistic medium, but the battle is most fervent in the world of cinematography. Following this familiar paradigm, there are two main approaches in the realist movement, namely, direct cinema and cinéma vérité.[8]

Direct cinema vs. cinéma vérité

Direct cinema is the "fly on the wall" filmatic approach. (Winston, 1995, p. 205)[9] Proponents of direct cinema believe there is one universal reality. In addition, direct cinema adherents argue that objective accounts of reality can be documented using technology, like the still or motion camera and sound recording. The camera, in direct cinema, should be as invisible as possible to the subjects being filmed. Direct cinematographers regard their presence as an insignificant speck recording the action, not affecting the overall reality being documented. Therefore, the director and crew never interfere or overtly interact with the event they are documenting. In addition, reenactments and staging are

not allowed in the direct cinema approach. An objective documentation of the events is of the utmost importance to the direct cinema filmmaker (Winston, 1988).

In homage to Dziga Vertov, a Russian filmmaker who coined the term "kino-pravda"—film truth, French documentarist Jean Rouch formalized the cinéma vérité style in the 1960's (Barnouw, 1983, p. 254). Contrary to direct cinema's "fly on the wall" style, cinéma vérité has a "fly in the soup" approach (Winston, 1995, p. 197). Like direct cinema, cinéma vérité filmmakers attempt to document the true experiences of an event. Unlike direct cinema, they are mainly interested in truthfully documenting the reality *as they witness it*. Therefore, cinéma vérité does not subscribe to the existence of one universal reality. Instead, cinéma vérité filmmakers embrace the unique and subjective nature of reality. They interact and play with their interpretation of the events taking place. As a result, it is not uncommon for cinéma vérité filmmakers to become personally involved with the subjects they are documenting. Cinéma vérité filmmakers are often self-reflexive by appearing on camera, exposing the camera process on film, or allowing the subjects to directly address the camera.

Barnouw suitably sums up the differences between the two battling approaches with the following observations:

> The direct cinema documentarist took his camera to a situation of tension and waited hopefully for a crisis; the Rouch version of cinéma vérité tried to precipitate one. The direct cinema artist aspired to invisibility; the Rouch cinéma vérité artist was often an avowed participant. The direct cinema artist played the role of an uninvolved bystander; the cinéma vérité artist espoused that of provocateur.

> Direct cinema found its truth in events available to the camera. Cinéma vérité was committed to a paradox; that artificial circumstances could bring hidden truth to the surface. (1983, p. 255).

During the 1960s, direct cinema faced serious objections about its claim of objectivity. Critics claimed that direct cinema did not, and could not, provide an objective account of reality. Too many subjective elements sneak into or are integral components of the cinematic experience to claim true signification of the referent. The cinéma vérité genre was not free from fire either. Their claim of subjectivity met with opposition as well. Winston dismisses the objective-subjective arguments offered by direct cinema and cinéma vérité:

> The films are claimed as objective evidence of the subjective experience of the film-maker—but so sensitive was that experience and so accurate is its recording on film that the audience can supposedly act as judge of the original event. The result is that this rhetorical strand, 'objectivity is bullshit', still in effect makes the same implicit cultural appeal to photography's scientific heritage as does the other strand of the direct cinema practitioners' 'window on what's happening' rhetoric. It is the film-maker's subjectivity that is being objectivity recorded. Direct cinema is still evidence of something—the film-maker's 'witness'.(1995, p. 162)

Thus, Winston argues that there is objectivity to be found in documentary programming, but it is not in the subject. Documentary films offer an objective look into the filmmaker's interpretation of reality, not reality itself.

Social Construction of Reality

> Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away.
> - Philip K. Dick

> Reality consists of the experiences we believe are real.
> What is real may or may not be the same for everyone.
> - Harry Palmer [10]

In the present section, some of the deeper philosophical issues underlying the social construction of reality and the notion of social constructivism in general

are examined. After all, a meaningful discussion about the existence of reality programming cannot take place, until some of the debate concerning the existence of reality itself is hashed out. As such, the current section looks at two contemporary philosophers, John Searle and Ian Hacking, and their views for and against the existence of an external reality. Whether or not an external reality actually does exist will not affect the current analysis; however, understanding the theoretical underpinning of social constructivism and reality will aid in understanding how reality programming is thereby constructed.

Some general questions covered throughout the present analysis are: What do we mean when we say "χ is real."? What is "social construction" and how does it differ from ordinary "construction"? Can the notions of social construction and reality work together and if so how? What are the arguments for and against the social construction of reality? If constructivists are correct, then what are the ontological and epistemological implications for the social sciences? Do these implications affect the natural sciences in any way? Finally, how do the answers to the queries above affect research in the social sciences and reality programming?

While the questions are many, the purported answers are even greater, spanning centuries of philosophical debate. However, for the purposes of the present section, two contemporary players, John Searle and Ian Hacking will serve as the primary focus. The section begins by examining Searle's account of reality, covering both his argument for external realism and his reasons for denying a universally constructed world. Next, an examination of Hacking's

enlightening comments against the notion of social constructivism is given. Finally, the possible implications of Searle's and Hacking's arguments will be discussed, including how their arguments affect the construction of reality television.

The primary goal of the current section is to provide some philosophical groundwork into how agents regard plain "reality" as opposed to the even more complex term "reality programming." Plain or not, talk of reality is one of the oldest and most heated debates circling in academia. How a person answers the question of "What is reality?" will impinge on every facet of his or her ontology, epistemology, and affect the theoretical foundations of his or her academic craft. Hence, the quest to discover what reality is and what one means when he or she calls something "real" reigns as one of the most fundamental and pivotal inquiries humans can engage in. Now, on to Searle's arguments concerning the social construction of reality.

Searle's book *The Construction of Social Reality* attempts to advance a central theory of the ontology of social facts and social institutions. The main question Searle asks throughout his book is, "How do we construct an objective social reality?" The last three chapters of Searle's book represent some of the introductory "housekeeping" material that Searle uses as groundwork for his main argument (1995, p. 150). Searle put this introductory material in the back of his book so that it would not "overbalance" his main argument (1995, p. xiii). It is the "housekeeping" material, the caboosed-backbone of Searle's argument that the author is interested in analyzing. Hence, the present section looks at

Searle's discussion of realism (Chapters 7 and 8 in the text). Chapter 9 attempts to provide an argument for external realism; however, we will not address Searle's argument for two reasons. First, Searle's argument is weak, though, admittedly it is perhaps impossible to give a "proof" of external realism that does *not* rely on empirical data (which, of course, would be presupposing the very thing you are trying to prove). Second, for the purposes of the present study, we are interested in examining the implications of Searle's argument, *assuming he is correct*. Thus we are granting his conclusion and analyzing the ripples in the pond of social scientific research.[11]

Searle's six presuppositions of one's contemporary world view

Searle begins by outlining six presuppositions of one's contemporary world view. These theoretical assumptions are used to help distinguish between epistemic objectivity/subjectivity and ontological objectivity/subjectivity. According to Searle,[12]

1. The world (or alternatively, reality or the universe) exists independently of our representations of it.

This presupposition is the view Searle refers to as "external realism." It is his main theoretical assumption and we will focus on his description of and argument for external realism in the pages that follow.

2. Human beings have a variety of interconnected ways of having access to and representing features of the world to themselves.

Searle calls these "representations." According to Searle, representations of the world contain both intrinsic intentionality (as in desires and observations) and derived intentionality (as in sentences and matrices).

3. Some of those representations, such as beliefs and statements, purport to be about and to represent how things are in reality....They are true if and only if they correspond to the facts in reality.

Searle notes that the above is a version of the correspondence theory of truth. Searle includes this version into his assumptions about reality, but later will insist that "realism does not imply the correspondence theory, since it does not imply that "truth" is the name of a relation of correspondence between statements and reality" (1995, p. 154). Discussion of this relationship is detailed below.

4. Systems of representation, such as vocabularies and conceptual schemes generally, are human creations, and to that extent arbitrary. It is possible to have any number of different systems of representations for representing the same reality.

The thesis Searle refers to above is that of "conceptual relativity." The thesis of conceptual relativity has serious implications for philosophers who want truth and reality to mesh. According to Searle, this is a meeting that will never take place:

> All representation, and a fortiori all truthful representation, is always under certain aspects and not others. The aspectual character of all representations derives from such facts as that representation is always made from within a certain conceptual scheme and from a certain point of view . . . . Strictly speaking, there is an indefinitely large number of different points of view, different aspects, and different conceptual systems under which anything can be represented. If that is right, and it surely is, then it will be impossible to get the coincidence between truth and reality after which so many traditional philosophers seem to hanker. (1995, pp. 175-176)

Thus, conceptual relativity maintains that representations are true if and only if they correspond to the facts of reality; however, as Searle asserts, an indefinite set of representations makes the chance of truth and reality coinciding very unlikely.

5. Actual human efforts to get true representations of reality are influenced by all sorts of factors—cultural, economic, psychological, and so on. Complete epistemic objectivity is difficult, sometimes impossible, because actual investigations are always from a point of view, motivated by all sorts of personal factors, and within a certain cultural and historical context.

The fifth assumption makes objective representations of reality very difficult if not entirely impossible (here, one can recognize the possible implications Searle's work has for the social sciences). Now Searle's final presupposition of our contemporary world view:

6. Having knowledge consists in having true representations for which we can give certain sorts of justification or evidence. Knowledge is thus by definition objective in the epistemic sense, because the criteria for knowledge are not arbitrary, and they are impersonal.

While objective representations may be impossible (#5), true representations (i.e. representations that correspond to the facts in reality, (#3) are achieved by providing evidence or justification that is epistemically verifiable. Searle believes that providing evidence or justification for one's representations makes them

"objective in the epistemic sense" because this verification is rigid and occurs independent of the agent.

Searle's formulation of external realism and its relation to truth

As Searle's first presupposition of the contemporary world view states, external realism is the view that the world exists *independent* of one's representations of it.[13] Searle uses Mount Everest to illustrate external realism:

> Mount Everest exists independently of how or whether I or anyone else ever represented it or anything else. Furthermore, there are many features of Mount Everest, for example, the sort of features that I represent if I make a statement such as "Mt. Everest has snow and ice near its summit," which would have remained totally unaffected if no one had ever represented them in any fashion and will not be affected by the demise of these or any other representations. (1995, p. 153)

Thus, Searle contends, Mount Everest and the world for that matter exist outside of one's representations. In fact, Searle adds, "reality does not depend on intentionality in any form" (1995, p. 153). No intentional states need to occur in order for Mount Everest to have snow and ice at its top. The world would exist virtually the same if humans were not present and, Searle claims, the world will be exactly the same when we are gone. Thus, when humans die, their representations die with them, the world (reality) stays the same.

Earlier Searle's belief that external realism does not imply the correspondence theory of truth was touched on. Presupposition #3 states that representations are true if and only if they *correspond* to the facts in reality. Having knowledge (#6) and, in effect, having true representations (#5) is something that, according to Searle, external realism is not affected by because external realism is an ontological view, not an epistemic view. Thus, Searle

argues, it is not inconsistent to accept external realism and deny the correspondence theory of truth. In addition, because external realism purports a real world independent of one's representations of it, how accurate one's representations are has no affect on the veracity of the theory.[14] As Searle explains:

> Properly understood, realism is not a thesis about how the world is in fact. We could be totally mistaken about how the world is in every detail and realism could still be true. *Realism is the view that there is a way that things are that is logically independent of all human representations. Realism does not say how things are but only that there is a way that they are.* And "things" in the previous two sentences does not mean material objects or even objects. It is, like the "it" in "It is raining," not a referring expression. (author's emphasis)(1995, p. 155)

Thus, according to Searle, external realism is not a theory about language, intentions, or epistemology, it is an ontological theory about the way things are that says that they are this way independent of any of one's representations about it. Subsequently, Searle maintains, external realism is not committed to the correspondence theory of truth or any other epistemic, semantic or ethical theory. Even if all one's representations about the world are false and all that exists are mental states, Searle asserts that external realism would be unaffected because it operates independent of one's representations (or even one's existence).

Three arguments against realism

Searle provides three of what he believes are the most powerful arguments against realism. The first argument is the conceptual relativity argument against realism. Proponents of the conceptual relativity argument claim that proposition #4 (Systems of representation are arbitrary human

creations and it is possible to have infinite representations for a singular reality) refutes presupposition #1 (external realism: there is a world that exists independent of one's representations of it). Thus, the argument goes, if one accepts conceptual relativism, and Searle admits that it seems "platitudinous," then he or she must reject external realism. However, Searle claims that if this were true, then "we ought to be able to state the two theses precisely enough for the inconsistency to be quite obvious" (161). When Searle formulates the two competing theses an obvious contradiction does not appear:

> ER1 = Reality exists independent of our representations of it
>
> CR1 = All representations of reality are made relative to some more or less arbitrarily selected set of concepts.

Searle contends that ER1 and CR1 do not even have the "appearance" of contradiction (161). According to Searle, ER1 merely states that there is something else out there that is independent of our representations and CR1 describes the way one chooses to form his or her representations of it. Hence there is no inconsistency in holding external realism and conceptual relativism.[15]

Searle now turns to the verificationist argument against external realism. The verificationist argument is concerned with language and meaning and states that nothing exists outside one's experience and knowledge of reality. According to Searle:

> I believe the basic philosophical motivation behind verificationists' arguments against realism is to try to eliminate the possibility of skepticism by removing the gulf between appearance and reality that makes skepticism possible in the first place. If reality consists in nothing but our experiences, if our experiences are somehow constitutive of reality, then

> the form of skepticism that says we can never get out of our experiences to the reality beyond is answered. (1995, p. 168)

Searle maintains that there are two components to the verificationist argument. First, the verificationist claims that all humans can ever realize are their experiences. If there is a reality that exists independent of peoples' representations of it, then they can never reach it because humans are stuck with only their representations. Second, since the only tool humans have to make claims about the world is their representations of the world, and since the real world exists outside of peoples' representational claims, then "ex hypothesi we are postulating something for which we can have no epistemic basis" (Searle, 1995, p. 170). According to Searle, the first strand of the verificationists' argument is mistaken. "It does not follow," Searle asserts, "that one does not have direct access to the real world whenever one employs one's perceptual apparatus to perceive it" (1995, p. 170). When one has a visual experience, one does not conclude on the basis of their visual experience that they are seeing χ. Searle argues, they "simply see it" (1995, p. 170).

Searle also finds fault with the verificationists' second claim, namely that our representational claims postulate the existence of something that we have no epistemic basis for claiming. According to Searle,

> From the fact that the epistemic basis for my knowledge is my present experiences, it does not follow that all I can know are my experiences. On the contrary, the way we described the example [an example of seeing a desk in front of him] was precisely a case where my experiences give me access to something that is not itself an experience. (1995, p. 171)

The third and final argument against external realism is the Ding an sich (a thing in itself) argument. The argument is sort of a combination of the conceptual

relativism and verificationist arguments. The basic idea of the Ding an sich argument against external realism is that (1) we can only see the world from inside our own perceptions; (2) there is no "God's-eye-view" we can look out on, (3) Because we lack a nonrepresentational standpoint from which we can compare our representations to reality we can never measure the adequacy of our representations, (4) Therefore, the only reality we can ever know is the one that is internal to us, and (5) Therefore, given the system we must work in, the only possible realism is internal realism.

Searle uses a technique similar to the one he applied on the conceptual relativist argument, namely, he formally states the premises of the Ding an sich argument to see if their conclusion really follows from their premises. Searle reconstructs the Ding an sich argument as follows:

P1 = Any cognitive state occurs as part of a set of cognitive states and within a cognitive system

From P1, we are to conclude

C1 = It is impossible to get outside of all cognitive states and systems to survey the relationships between them and the reality that they are used to cognize.

From C1, we are to further conclude:

C2 = No cognition is ever of a reality that exists independently of cognition.

Searle admits that C1 does follow from P1. "But so what?" Searle remarks, "It simply does not follow from the fact that all cognition is within a cognitive system

that no cognition is ever directly of a reality that exists independently of all cognition. Conclusion 2 just does not follow" (1995, p.175). Here more is needed in Searle's refutation because he has not offered a convincing case that representations originating from and remain contained within our internal system can give us a direct link to an external world that is independent of our representations.

The following example should clarify Searle's weakness. If we watch an event on television, say the military operations in Kosovo, we are not directly experiencing the event itself. The closest thing we can get to direct experience is through the little box in our living room. Now there is much we can learn and even "know" about the Kosovo conflict through the mediate and internal experiences of our television; however, the television does not and cannot provide us with a *direct* link to any outside phenomena. Even if we casually live our lives *as if* we do have direct knowledge of what is going on in Kosovo, the fact of the matter is we do not have a direct connection with the events occurring in Kosovo via the television and we never will. To suggest that televisual representations could serve as a *possible* means to direct representations is a mistake. If Searle wants to claim that we can achieve direct representations of reality from within our own internal representation (the internal televisions in our head if you will) he is either advocating a very weak notion of "direct representation of reality" or is mistaken. In either case, more discussion on his dismissal of the Ding an sich argument against external reality is needed.

In summary, Searle is an external realist who claims that there is a reality that exists independent of our representations of it. Searle's notion of external realism does not entail any epistemic, semantic or truth claims. External realism, according to Searle is an ontological theory that states there is a reality that exists totally independent of our representations. Finally, Searle refutes what he takes to be the three most powerful arguments against external realism and concludes that the conceptual relativist, verificationist, and Ding an sich arguments pose no serious threat for the external realist. In the next section, we will examine some of Hacking's claims against social constructivism in general and then discuss how both Searle's and Hacking's work might affect the fields of natural and social scientific research.

In his book *The Social Construction of What?* Ian Hacking looks at the notion of "social construction" particularly as it is used in academia. Hacking's main goal in the book is determine the utility, if one exists, for claiming that χ is socially constructed. Hacking uses witty and rich descriptions to illustrate how the notion of social constructivism has been used (and overly used) in the social sciences and the natural sciences. Hacking also discusses kind-making as a means of social construction. In the present section, the discussion will be limited to Hacking's thoughts on what one means when he or she says something is "socially constructed."

Hacking begins by explaining one of the fears many realists have about accepting a social constructivist model. One great fear, according to Hacking, is

the fear of relativism. Hacking jokingly refers to relativism as a "wicked troll" (4). However, Hacking's goal is not to dispel realist's concerns over relativism:

> Relativism and decline are real worries, but I am not going to address them directly. It is good to stay away from them, for I cannot expect successfully to dispel or solve problems where so many wise heads have written so many wise words without effect. (1999, p. 5)

Instead, Hacking explains the point of social constructivism. That is, when one says χ is socially constructed, what does she really mean? Typically, Hacking notes, social constructivism is critical of the status quo and in general, social constructivists hold that:

> (1) χ need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. χ or χ as it is at present, is not determined by the nature of things; it is not inevitable.

Hacking maintains that social constructivists can further argue that:

> (2) χ is quite bad as it is.
>
> (3) We would be much better off if χ were done away with, or at least radically transformed

Thesis (1) is a basic tenant of social constructivism. It states that χ is not "determined by the nature of things" or "inevitable," but rather it "was brought into existence or shaped by social events, forces, history, all which could well have been different" (Hacking, 1999, p. 7). Theses (2) and (3) go further to make normative claims about χ, but are not a necessary element to a social constructivist position.

Hacking provides an excellent example of a socially constructed term, namely, the social construction of a child viewer of television. The following is an

excerpt from Hacking, describing the social construction of the child viewer of television:

> It is urged that the very idea of this definite kind of person, the child viewer of television, is a construct. Although children have watched television since the advent of the box, there is (it is claimed) no definite class of children who are "child viewers of television" until "the child viewer of television" becomes thought of as a social problem. The child viewer, steeped in visions of violence, primed for the role of consumer, idled away from healthy sport and education, become an object of research. Putting it crudely, what is socially constructed, in this case, is an *idea*, the idea of the child viewer. (1999, p. 26)
>
> Once we have the phrase, the label, we get the notion that there is a definite kind of person, the child viewer, a species. This *kind* of person becomes reified. Some parents start to think of their children as child viewers, a special type of child (not just their kid who watches television). They start to interact, on occasion, with their children regarded not as their children but as child viewers.
>
> Thus a social construction claim becomes complex. What is constructed is not only a certain classification, a certain kind of person, the child viewer. It is also children who, it might be argued, become socially constructed or reconstructed within the matrix. One of the reasons that social construction theses are so hard to nail down is that, in the phrase "the social construction of χ," the χ may implicitly refer to entities of different types, and the social construction may in part involve interaction between entities of the different types. In my example, the first reference of the χ is a certain classification, or kind of person, the child viewer. A subsidiary reference may be children themselves, individual human beings. And yet not simply the children, by their ways of being children, Catherine-as-a-child-viewer-of-television. So you see that "the social construction of what?" need not have a single answer. That causes a lot of problems in constructionist debates. (1999, pp. 27-28)

Hacking's child viewer of television example illustrates how we create new kinds (kind-making) out of our world through our culture, class, etc. In other words, kinds like "child viewer of television" are socially constructed by us.

Just because χ is socially constructed, Hacking argues, does not mean that it is not real. According to Hacking, a social construct can be epistemically

objective, but ontologically subjective. Using a baseball example of balls and strikes, Hacking argues something can be both socially constructed and real. Balls and strikes, Hacking notes, are socially constructed, that is "the idea of what a strike is, is a social product" (1999, p. 30). Using Searle's wording, a strike is epistemically objective because "whether or not someone struck out is an objective fact" (Hacking, 1999, p. 30). However, Hacking asserts, strikes are also ontologically subjective because "there would be no strikes without the institution of baseball, without the rules and practices of people" (1999, p. 30). Thus, socially constructed things can be epistemically objective and ontologically subjective.

In sum, Hacking contends that social constructivism is popular term used (and often overly used) in academia. According to Hacking when one claims that χ is socially constructed they are claiming that the nature of χ is not set in stone or rigidly determined. A socially constructed χ is created by social elements and antecedent conditions, all of which could be have been different than what they currently are.

Implications of Searle's and Hacking's positions

Next, we will examine what implications Searle's and Hacking's positions pose for the social sciences, the natural sciences and the researcher's long-term research goals. Let us begin with perhaps the easiest discipline to discuss, with respect to the implications of realism and social constructivism debate, the natural sciences.

According to Hacking, social constructivism does not affect the natural sciences in the same way that it affects the social sciences. A social scientific kind, like "child viewer of television," Hacking claims, is an interactive kind because it interacts with people and can change as a result of those interactions. Conversely, Hacking argues that the "classifications and concepts of the natural sciences are" not interactive (1999, p. 32).

> A social construction thesis for the natural sciences would hold that, in a thoroughly nontrivial sense, a successful science did not have to develop in the way it did, but could have had different successes evolving in other ways that do not converge on the route that was in fact taken, Neither a prior set of bench marks nor the world itself determines what will be the next set of bench marks in high-energy physics or any other field of inquiry. I myself find this idea hard to state, let alone to believe. (1999, p. 33)

Thus, Hacking concludes, social constructivism does not have any serious implications for the natural sciences because it does not impinge on the natural sciences the way it impinges on the interactively designed social sciences.

So how might social constructivism or its negation, realism, affect social scientific research? The most substantial changes will take place in social science's epistemic foundations. If social constructivism is correct, then objectivist/empirical/quantitative methodologies and perspectives will have their ontological and epistemological rug yanked from underneath them. After all, if there is no objective, independent reality that exists outside of our representations, then what are their generalizable data being generalized for?

Furthermore, it seems that even if social constructivists are wrong and we embrace an external view of reality there is still trouble for the social sciences (at least for the objective/empirical/quantitative social sciences). Given Searle's

presuppositions about our contemporary world view, in particular presupposition #3 (representations are true if and only if they correspond to the facts in reality) and presupposition #5 (complete epistemic objectivity is difficult, sometimes impossible, because representations come from an internal point or view, influenced by a number of factors) it seems highly unlikely that most social scientific research that attempts to provide objective, generalizable and quantitative conclusions will succeed.

On the other hand, qualitative/critical/hermeneutic researchers need not worry about the issue of whether an external reality exists or not because their ontology and their epistemology do not directly depend on the answer to the reality question. That is, whether or not there is a reality that exists independent of our representations is not what the qualitative researcher is interested in discovering. It could very well be the case that external realism is true and that would not affect the qualitative research one bit because her interests lie in the representations, not the "real" thing.

As for the present analysis of how different adult media users interpret, understand and characterize "reality programming," it too is unaffected by the reality bug. It could be the case that there is some objective, external measure of what really is "reality programming," but that is not the goal of the current study. The present analysis seeks to understand not the reality that exists independent of our representations, but the reality that *is* our representations. It is much more interesting for to ask how and why different groups of people construct "reality programming" even if they are totally off the mark from an objective point of view.

Of course, Searle is right to mention that our representations could all be wrong and yet external realism could still be the correct view. The researcher questions the efficacy of trying to prove the existence of an external reality. We will always conduct our research and examinations from inside Plato's cave and hence all we have to go on are internal notions of what we take to be accurate representations or, if you will, shadows on the wall. We can even grant Searle external realism, but since we can never epistemically get to external reality its existence becomes as meaningful as the existence of invisible fairies. Sure, external reality and invisible fairies might exist, but since you'll never empirically prove the existence of such things what is the intellectual motive behind proving it? On the other hand, whether or not an external reality actually does exist has no impact on the state of qualitative social scientific research. Thus, it appears that the quantitative social sciences have some theoretical housekeeping to attend to no matter who wins on the social constructivist vs. external realist debate. However, qualitative researchers in the social sciences need not necessarily worry over who wins out on the age-old debate between social constructivists and external realists.

Finally, let's examine how the non-existence (or 'unprovability') of an external reality affects the two major approaches of documentary film, namely, direct cinema and cinéma vérité. Direct cinematographers embrace a worldview that necessitates the existence of an objective, external reality. After all, they claim that documentation of such a world is possible through assiduous compliance to the rigorous direct cinema guidelines and principles. Therefore, if

an external reality does not exist or, perhaps worse, it may exist, but is forever outside of our epistemic (and hence cinematic) reach, then it appears the theoretical groundwork of direct cinema must crumble. Remarking on the seemingly disastrous state of direct cinema, Winston asserts:

> The cost, then, for our greater understanding of the limits of objectivity is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the camera's ability to record. It is clear that the direct-cinema practitioners have brought this upon themselves. They have not distanced themselves from the previous Griersonian rhetoric. Indeed, they have claimed to be the only true believers in the great tradition . . . . They are unprepared to address the paradox of their own reputations as filmmakers (or artists) against the supposed transparency of their fly-on-the-wall techniques. They will not acknowledge the essential work of fictionalization that goes on in the cutting room. The result is that direct cinema has been sailing away on whaling expeditions without proper chars, seeking quite the wrong sort of beasts. The crisis of documentary is therefore deepening. The danger is that film's ability to tell us anything of the world will be lost in the wreck of the direct-cinema idea. (1988, p. 529)

Winston argues for practitioners of the direct cinema tradition to reevaluate their theoretical and methodological principles given contemporary views of reality and objectivity. Thus, direct cinema, like the quantitative social sciences, must either adapt their theoretical and methodological stance, and admit the possible non-existence of an external reality, or, like any other organism that does not adapt to changes occurring around them, face the Darwinian alternative—extinction.

Contrary to direct cinema, cinéma vérité is unaffected by the existence or non-existence of an external reality. Practitioners of the cinéma vérité approach are not interested in documenting an external, objective reality. In fact, they deny either the efficacy of doing so or the outright existence of an external reality. Instead, cinéma vérité filmmakers thrive on the unique interpretations participants assign to the reality surrounding them. The truth cinéma vérité artists are interested in uncovering is not one that coincides with an objective reality.

Instead, cinéma vérité filmmakers strive to accurately formulate their unique encounter documenting a particular person, event or subject, forgoing any pretense of objective truth or external reality. Thus, cinéma vérité does not confuse actuality and truth. Hampe, talks about the error of "trying to stuff reality into a box" and the confusion between "the *truth* of the documentary" and "the *actuality* of the situation" being documented:

> It may be worth noting that the French chose the term *vérité*, not *réalité*, to describe *cinéma* as found in the behavioral documentary [Hampe uses the term behavioral documentary and direct cinema interchangeably]. What is shot bears only an ideal relationship to what is shown. The documentary shown to an audience is a carefully constructed analog that has been abstracted from the footage that was shot. It has been tempered by the overall truth of the situation as the documentarian understands it and, indeed, by the *honesty* of the documentarian in constructing the program.
>
> In a move that later became a habit, Public Broadcasting. . . spent more than a million dollars and two years making a multipart documentary about the members of a single family. And when the furor over *An American Family* died down, the notions of cinematic truth and cinematic reality had taken some heavy blows to the body, and all that remained was the conviction that what was shown in the series had, in fact, happened—somewhere, sometime—while a camera was running. (1997, pp. 23-25)

Thus, An American Family marked the beginning of the resurrection of cinéma vérité principles, applied to the new genre of reality television programming. The next section examines growth of the reality television genre.

The Genre of Reality Television Programming

In 1973, Craig Gilbert decided to use the cinéma vérité approach to shoot one of the first reality programs made for television—*An American Family*. An "astonished nation" watched the PBS series which featured "the dysfunctional Loud family" of Southern California (Kiska, 2000, p. 1). In 1971, the Louds, a

family from Santa Barbara, California, agreed to have cameras follow them from morning till night for seven months. Gilbert wanted to capture the everyday lives of a 'typical' middle-class family. In describing his instructions to the Louds and his structural philosophy of the show, Gilbert remarks:

> My instructions were that they were to live their lives as if there were no camera present. They were to do nothing differently than they would ordinarily. This would be hard at first but would, I promised, become increasingly easier. We would never ask them to do anything just for the camera. In other words, we would never stage anything and we would never ask them to do or say something over again if we happened to miss it. To the best of our ability we would not become involved in the family's problems. By that I meant that as far as was humanly possible we would not intrude our feelings, opinions, or personalities into family disputes, discussions, or relationships. This last restriction became, as the filming progressed, the hardest restriction to live up to. (1988, p. 193)

Indeed, *An American Family* provided enough drama, both on and off camera, to compete with any fictional prime-time soap opera. During the seven months, audiences watched Bill Louds (the husband) carryout extramarital affairs, Pat Louds (the wife) divorce her husband after painfully learning about the affairs, and the parents discover that one of their children was gay. Behind the scenes, camera operators, in essence, lived with the Louds and developed extremely close personal relationships with them. These interpersonal relationships became so intense that they interfered with the shooting and at least one crewmember had to be reassigned (Gilbert, 1988, p. 200). Thus, from its inception, reality television programming has embraced a close, interpersonal style, not so much by choice, but by the nature of the medium. Television is an up-close and personal medium. It is difficult, if not impossible to record the daily lives individuals, live, eat, and even sleep under the same roof with these participants and not form some bond or interact with them.

Reality crime television

During the late 1980s a different form of reality programming emerged, reality crime television. According to Cavender and Bond-Maupin, reality crime television represents "a hybrid programming format in that a news or public service format is superimposed on entertainment" (Cavender & Bond-Maupin, 1993, p. 305). Beginning with *Unsolved Mysteries* and *America's Most Wanted*, their popularity spawned several clones including *Cops*, *Crimewatch Tonight*, *True Stories of the Highway Patrol*, *American Detective*, *Untold Stories of the F.B.I.*, *L.A.P.D.* and *Rescue 911* (Cavender & Fishman, 1998, p. 10).

What separates *Unsolved Mysteries* and *America's Most Wanted* from their replicas is their interactive element. Both programs showcase criminals that are on the loose and crimes that are currently unsolved. With the guidance of an omniscient male moderator, reenactments and other details about the crime and fugitive, the programs urge the viewer to get involved and help solve the crime or bag the bad guy. There is a toll-free number the viewer can call 24 hours a day to give anonymous tips and information. Andrew Goodwin speaks on the audiences' desire to participate:

> Like the good Samaritans who stop their cars and pull off the freeway to save the life of a young girl trapped under her overturned vehicle, we want to be involved. Shows like. . . *America's Most Wanted* rescue us from the epistemology of the couch potato (naturalism). We don't want to sit there any longer, ogling all those wars and famines with nothing to be done. Americans are constructed as a people who adhere to the admirable belief that there are no problems, only solutions. (1993, p. 28)

The television industry taps into the viewers' need to participate by allowing them to interact with the program and ultimately make a difference.

Incredibly, both shows credit viewers for capturing criminals and solving crimes.[16] In fact, *America's Most Wanted* claims that as a direct result of viewer leads, 626 criminals have been caught since the series began in 1988 ("Recent Captures," 2000). In addition, *Unsolved Mysteries* claims that "viewers have helped law enforcement officials apprehend approximately 40% of the fugitives profiled on the series since its premiere," and that the show "has been responsible for 93 reunions and has solved 280 cases to date" ("*Unsolved Mysteries*", 2000).

Unlike *Unsolved Mysteries* and *America's Most Wanted*, *Cops* has no interactive element or encouraging host to guide the viewer through the violent, emotive events of police work. John Katz describes the show:

> Syndicated nationwide by Fox television, *Cops* is one of the most successful of the gritty new telecasts that offer Americans more reality than they ever imagined possible. Taped by crews carrying mobile shoulder-held video cameras, shows like *Cops* are what producers call "unfiltered" television—a new wave of reality-based entertainment. . . . No reporter or producer narrates *Cops*; no equivalent of the journalist offers a detached perspective. The cameras ride with the police in their patrol cars. Following the officers and picking up the sound of jangling keys and handcuffs, squeaking radios and creaking leather as they arrest drunk drivers, rush into vicious bar brawls, quell domestic disputes, chase burglars onto rooftops, arrive at murder and accident scenes, pursue kids in stolen cars at hair-raising speeds, and get punched, kicked, run over, spat upon, stabbed, and sometimes shot at by the people they confront. (1993, pp. 25-260)

Thus, unlike *America's Most Wanted* and *Unsolved Mysteries*, the purpose behind watching the violent material is not to help solve a crime or catch a crook, but to simply gaze at criminal behavior.

Critics have shot at the voyeuristic format of *Cops* from its inception. Much of the criticism surrounding *Cops* stems from the show's content, blurring

the line between information and entertainment. In an attempt to make the program entertaining for viewers, hours of video, which show police officers merely sitting in their squad cars or filling out piles of paperwork is edited out. As Robin Anderson asserts:

> Docu-cop programs exclude *boredom*, an integral component of everyday life. The excitement of video reality is, therefore, created through a taping and editing process in which time itself is contracted into jerky abbreviations, context is denied, and boredom is obscured. The "reality" is a contrivance, an appearance. So, while everything appears to be happening here and now, in real time it is not. (1994, p. 8)

Because *Cops* is a popular show, with an average GAA rating of 4.2, it has the attention of a large, widely dispersed demographic audience (Coe, 1996, p. 36). Therefore, any incongruities between the reality captured and that created, and their effects on society are a great concern for critics. *Cops* has the power to shape how our society views crime, criminal behavior, and police officers. Aaron Doyle argues:

> Certainly, "Cops" influences many viewers' attitudes. It demonstrates strongly how the storytelling of mass media can be ideological. Its techniques shape "raw reality" into made-for-TV stories that reinforce existing inclinations among many audience members toward law and order ideology. . . . "Cops" not only portrays events and practices in the criminal justice system, but it actually helps reshape them. For example, it not only records arrests; it helps shape how they are conducted and experienced by the participants, and even how some future police officers may conduct their arrests. (1998, p. 112)

Thus, reality crime programming, and in particular *Cops*, has the ability not only to affect the publics' view of crime, criminals, and law enforcement, but also to affect the criminal justice system itself.

The effects of having cameras present at real-life crime scenes has been a heated topic and even been subject to judicial debate. In 1993, CBS followed

Secret Service agents as they searched a Brooklyn apartment for a segment on their *Street Stories* program. At issue was what becomes of the videographic evidence taken by CBS. Should the prosecution be allowed to use the tape or should the defendant claim rights to the material taped on his property? U.S. District Judge Jack B. Weinstein ruled that CBS must relinquish the tape to the defendant and described the network as "a participant in the execution of a search warrant," making the petition of a "newsgatherer's privilege" operate "weakly, if at all" (Denniston, 1993, p. 46).

In general, the courts have been critical of law enforcement allowing media crews to accompany them when entering homes or chasing offenders (Denniston, 1999a). Issues involving invasion of privacy and the media's encouragement to engage in high-speed chases, which are more entertaining to watch, were the focus of Supreme Court discussions in May 1999. Outlined by Lyle Denniston, the Supreme Court decision

> imposed a tight new limit. . . on the police practice of taking along reporters, photographers, and other observers to watch arrests or searches—an activity that supplies much of the film footage for today's "reality television." In a unanimous ruling. . . the court declared it unconstitutional for police or federal agents to include outsiders when a police operation enters a private home or other private property . . . . The decision will still allow police to take along reporters, photographers and others on routine patrols. . . and will not bar entries into private homes or property if the owner gives consent. (1999b, p. 1A)

Law enforcement is now liable for damages "for invasion of privacy." However, the Supreme Court ruled that law enforcement "cannot be sued for damages over past so-called ride-alongs" (Denniston, 1999b, p. 1A). Thus, programs like *Cops* face stricter guidelines and scrutiny over how they obtain their graphic

docu-cop footage. However, reality crime programming is not the only type of reality programming that faces tough scrutiny.

Caught-on-tape reality programming

During the middle to late 1990s another branch of reality television programming surfaced, namely, caught-on-tape reality programming.[17] This type of reality programming has spawned the most criticism, labeling it as a trashy, tabloid, and cheap form of entertainment. The basic format of caught-on-tape reality programs consists of a host moderating viewers through a series of amateur videotape segments. Here the impact of technology can be seen, allowing the amateur videographer to capture images anywhere, anytime. In fact, the bulk of these caught-on-tape reality programs "now depend on viewers at home submitting various types of video material which is then packaged and presented as a reality show" (Kilborn, 1994, p.427).

The video is usually categorized into one particular subject. For example, a program will display caught-on-tape segments that pertain to scary car crashes (*World's Scariest Car Crashes*) or criminal behavior (*World's Stupidest Criminals*) or humorous moments (*America's Funniest Home Videos*) or animal attacks (*When Animals Attack*). Another caught-on-tape reality program, *Real TV*, packages its content differently. *Real TV* airs weekdays, during dinner-time (7 PM Eastern). A male moderator backdropped, by a nightly-news-type set (sort of a contemporary-looking *Dateline* set), guides viewers through the video clips, which are not arranged topically. So, unlike the World's Scariest/Funniest/Stupidest-caught-on-tape reality programming, *Real TV* gives

viewers a daily mélange of animal attacks, car crashes, and criminal behavior gone wrong.

Both topical and non-topical caught-on-tape reality programming relentlessly use replay and slow motion to evoke a visceral response from the audience. Usually, right at the video clip's most horrifying moment the show plays that instant in slow motion and repeats the terrifying instant over and over, accentuating the tragic element of the narrative. For example, when showing a clip of a family observing the primate enclosure at the zoo, the show will stop and put the clip in slow motion to show the exact moment that a young boy in the family falls over the barricade wall and into the primate enclosure. Then, they will show this same disturbing clip, in slow motion, again and again. It is not uncommon for the program to show the segment four or five times. To dramatize the moment even more, caught-on-tape programs will often include interviews of the participants in the video clips, describing how they felt and what they endured.

The Real World meets *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*

MTV's *The Real World* is a somewhat similar modern-day version of *An American Family*. Like *An American Family*, *The Real World* records the day to day events of the lives of a family. Unlike, *An American Family*, *The Real World* handpicks the family (from thousands of applications) of young adults, usually in their early to middle twenties, and places them in a fishbowl environment where they are under surveillance 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In addition to daily footage, we watch each roommate talk directly into the camera in the

"confessional" room.[18] Of course the producers of the show, Bumin and Murray, pick an eclectic mix of personalities and backgrounds so that we can see, as the show's opening sequence reveals: "what happens when people stop being polite, and start gettin' real." Ecklund describes *The Real World* and its success:

> The series, which debuted in 1992, seemed tailor-made for the music network, known for its hip and edgy format and frenetic camera style. The show's voyeuristic appeal along with the '90s' youth-oriented, Generation X-obsessed media, propelled the show into TV history. While MTV didn't invent the reality-TV genre, no one would deny that it owned the franchise. That is until now. (2000, p. 1)

Ecklund refers to the arrival, during the summer of 2000, of CBS's *Survivor*, which became the biggest success story for reality television to-date. *Survivor* and CBS's other, less successful, unscripted drama, *Big Brother* combine "two formats that are becoming staples of prime-time network TV: the "reality" series and the game show" (Farhi, 1999, p.C01). Unlike the typical game show, the contestants play the game 24 hours a day for weeks or even months until one contestant is left the winner. Moreover, the setting for the game is not a posh, electrified studio, but a remote, deserted island and a sterile, uninviting compound. Torode reproachfully describes the *Survivor* series:

> It combines the greed underlying last year's summer smash series *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* with a touch of *Gilligan's Island* and a dash of modern through-the-lens voyeurism. *Survivor* follows the lives of 16 Americans dumped with limited supplies on an island off Borneo in the South China Sea for six weeks earlier this year. In a touch of enforced Darwinism, the group—actually split into two rival camps—meet every three days or so to vote to throw someone off the island. The last contestant wins—surprise, surprise—US$ 1 million. (2000, p. 12)

The reality game show idea is not American. In fact, both *Survivor* and *Big Brother* were engendered in Europe.[19] *Big Brother* was created by Paul Romer, a Dutch producer who has overseen several *Big Brother* 'houses' in Europe and

manages the American *Big Brother* house (Streisand, 2000, p.51). The Dutch version locks 10 strangers in a house for 100 days and gives the last remaining houseguest $100,000 (Kloer, 2000, p. G5). The American *Big Brother* will up the ante by awarding the final remaining houseguest $500,000 for only 88 days of confinement. Ratings for the American *Big Brother* have not lived up to its European counterparts; however, the European versions have always included some of the houseguests having sex, while the American houseguests remained celibate.

Survivor, often described as *Lord of the Flies* meets MTV's *Real World*, is modeled after the BBC's *Castaway 2000* and Sweden's *Expedition Robinson* (Klotz, 2000, p. A9). Like *Survivor*, participants of *Castaway 2000* are marooned on a small island. However, unlike *Survivor*, they do not have to endure the extreme physical challenges in which the *Survivor* players need to excel in order to remain on the island. *Castaway* participants also do not have to hunt and gather their own food (Klotz, 2000). In sharp contrast, the *Survivor* crew is given some rice and not much else for rations. Thus, the *Survivor* participants have resorted to eating rats, bugs and even dog food to stay fed. The length of the challenge also differs between the two shows. *Castaway* contestants must stay on the island for one year, while *Survivor* participants only need to survive 39 days of the rough island living (Klotz, 2000). Sweden's *Expedition Robinson*, another predecessor of the *Survivor* series, has been filming in Malaysia for three years and recently has been criticized for the suicide of one of the contestants voted off the island (Klotz, 2000).

Another integral element of reality game shows is their use of isolation. The European and its American protégés, *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, exploit the isolating nature of the game. That is, both use extreme isolation from the outside world in order to strip the veneer off of the stereotypical facades each participant displays. Rothstein explains:

> The concept behind these shows is not unfamiliar. Take a group of types—figures who, in their occupations or views, are recognizably representative personalities—and throw them together in an isolating setting . . . . [The settings thus become] microcosms of a society which various public roles collide, revealing hypocrisy or crudity or sterility or venality. Names become irrelevant.
>
> The types are part of these shows as well. On the island [*Survivor*]: the single mother of two, the clueless doctor, the leather-skinned Navy Seal; in the house [*Big Brother*]: the middle-aged dad, the exotic dancer, the eccentric virgin, the quiet beauty queen. And much of the drama is how, once pulled away from the society that defines those roles, figures like these manage to fend for themselves, supposedly becoming more "real" in their isolation, unveiling private truths. (2000, p.2)

The private truths revealed often have long-lasting effects on the participants and their families and loved ones. In the next section, we will examine some of the controversy and criticism surrounding the use and arguably misuse of participants and issues dealing with "our fascination with abomination" (Petrozzello, 2000, p.46).

Audience and Participant Analysis

Audiences of reality television programs are fanatical about their chosen show. For example, according to America Online statistics, during the first six weeks alone, 8.5 million people visited the show's web site, that is one out of every eight people online were visiting the *Big Brother* site (*Big Brother*, 2000). In addition, America Online reported that over 14,000 *Big Brother* fan pages were

created and more than 400,000 messages were posted (*Big Brother*, 2000).[20] Thus, audience participation in reality television programming can be quite intense. The present section reviews how audiences have responded to and are affected by reality television programs and how direct involvement in these shows, especially the reality game show variety, has changed the lives of the participants of reality television programs. Let us begin by examining how the content and form of a reality program affect audiences.

Given the immediacy of the *Survivor* and *Big Brother* phenomena, there are no in-depth articles addressing the effects of viewing CBS's new reality television programs. Surprisingly, even though *The Real World* and *Road Rules* have been on the air for nearly eight years and enjoy a fervent following of fans, no academic research uncovering the effects of viewing MTV's reality-based shows has been conducted. The absence of audience effects research on MTV reality programming is particularly unexpected because much of the effects research conducted deals with older children and young adults—MTV's primary market for most of its programming and certainly *The Real World* and *Road Rules*.

Most of the research examining the effects of viewing reality television programming deal with negative effects, or at least the hypotheses researchers are interested in testing, include the possible negative effects of heavy to moderate reality television viewing.[21] Also, reality television effects research concentrates on one specific type of reality programming. For example, Davis

and Mares examine the effects of talk show viewing on teenage viewers.[22] All three of their hypotheses are stated in negative effects of viewing talk shows:

(a) Viewers overestimate the frequency of deviant behaviors;

(b) Viewers become desensitized to the suffering of others; and

(c) Viewers trivialize the importance of social issues.

Davis and Mares found support for their first hypothesis, but not for the second. All of the teenagers, Davis and Mares report, but especially the heavy viewers, overestimated the frequency of selected deviant behaviors (teen runaways, teenage pregnancy, sexual activity, guns in school, marital infidelity) (1998, pp. 79-80). In addition, contrary to their third hypothesis, the researchers discovered that adolescents who viewed talk shows dealing with teenage pregnancy were more likely to view teenage pregnancy as a serious social issue (Davis & Mares, 1998, p. 82).

Another example of audience effects research that concentrates on one type of programming is Oliver's and Armstrong's study of reality-based and fictional crime shows. The authors discovered that:

> Reality-based programs were most enjoyed by viewers who evidenced higher levels of authoritarianism, reported greater punitiveness about crime, and reported higher levels of racial prejudice. (1995, p. 565)

In contrast, enjoyment of fictional crime shows was not related to viewer attitudes, suggesting that the effects of viewing reality-based crime programming are significant (Oliver & Armstrong, 1995, p. 565). That is, viewers who already have a predilection for austere law enforcement and hold racially intolerant attitudes find the reality-based elements of *Cops* and other programs more enjoyable because they reinforce their preconceived attitudes about race and

crime. Using an episode of *Night Beat* as his example, Andersen warns that reality crime shows pose a serious threat to society's views about crime and race:

> All of the actual on-camera arrests made during one "Night Beat" program were for small amounts of powdered cocaine, and all of those arrested were black or Latino. But powered cocaine is the drug of choice among middle-class and affluent whites, who would bristle and sue at the mere thought of being harassed, swept, and detained along the lines of the "Night Beat" formula—particularly in their own neighborhoods. But the tabloid-crime format of such reality shows simply reinforces the false impression that minorities are solely responsible for the drug trade and are therefore deserving, collectively, of the kind of treatment seen on "Night Beat." The media's quest for such cheap, reality-based programming has only served to increase the public's misunderstanding of criminal-justice issues, especially as these relate to drug abuse and drug related crimes. (1994, p. 12)

Reality television programming holds a unique power in that the images it purports to depict accurately, or at least viewers take for granted as true significations, effect how our society experiences and reacts to the subject of a text. As such, people invest more epistemically in texts they believe to be about real people, in real events, than in programs that overt display their artificiality.

Not only do audiences of reality television programming invest deeply in the content they are viewing, the participants, who *are* the content, provide the ultimate investment—themselves. As such, becoming a cast member of a reality television show has profound effects on the participants. Many wonder why someone would want to be placed in a fishbowl environment for days, weeks or even months, having no privacy or control over how they are edited and displayed to the public. In an interview with Dr. Drew Pinsky, health and relationship expert for *Big Brother*, the producers of the show inquire why the

participants of *Big Brother* gave up their day-to-day lives and contact with the outside world for three months to be a part of the *Big Brother* experience:

> As we learn more and more about these folks we can see that all of them tend to have some aspirations one way or another in media. Some of them are kind of ashamed of it, but you can see the idea of having some kind of opportunity kind of creeping out. . . . Except Eddie [who ended up winning the grand prize], he's the one who just wants the money. . . . He's been very honest and very clear. He's probably the only one who's been really clear about his motivations. Maybe he's the only one who understands his motivations. The other ones are less clear. Most of them have gotten what they wanted. They've gotten an opportunity to be on national TV and a platform and as such, opportunities come their way that wouldn't have otherwise. . . . We are obsessed not just with media, but also with fame. . . . And with celebrity. Money used to be much more the issue, now celebrity became more important than money. People will choose celebrity above money. ("Dr. Drew Interview," 2000, p. 4-5)

Thus, one motivation for participating in a reality television program is to gain national media exposure and create occupational opportunities in the media industry. One motivation frequently cited by reality television participants is their hope that they will grow as a person and enjoy new and exciting experiences as a result of being a part of a reality television show. This reasoning is given particularly for shows, like *The Real World*, which offer no cash reward. That is, the participants who engage in the prescribed reality program's lifestyle are not given any cash or prize at the end of their involvement. However, despite the fact that they are not given any monetary rewards, several former *Real World* cast members, as well as members from other reality television programs, have gone on the lucrative careers in the media industry.

Just how do networks like MTV, CBS, and ABC find participants? In most cases, networks and producers of reality television shows are flooded with applications from people who are eager to become the subject of American's

gaze. MTV and CBS receive tens of thousands of applicants for their reality programs (*Real World* and *Road Rules*; *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, respectively)(Ostrow, 2000; Torode, 2000; *Real World Casting Special*, 2000).[23] Hundreds of young males lined up for hours to audition for ABC's *Making of the Band* (Weintraub, 2000, p.1E). Once the list of potential cast members has been pared down, producers often run extensive psychological tests on the finalists evaluating their ability to endure the extreme stress within the reality program experience and the intense media attention they will tackle once their televisual encounter is over (Streisand, 2000; Kiska, 2000).

Research Questions

Based on the above literature, the following research questions have emerged (see Appendix A for a copy of research questions):

RQ1: How do academics characterize reality television programming?

RQ2: How do academics differentiate reality programming with other types of non-fiction programming?

RQ3: How does the current trend of reality programming differ from earlier reality-type programs like *Candid Camera* or *An America Family*?

RQ4: How do viewers characterize reality television programming?

RQ5: Are there varying degrees of reality programming (i.e. are there some reality shows that are more real than others?)?

RQ6: How are reality programs produced and how do these production elements differ from fictional shows?

RQ7: Do viewers believe it possible to capture reality and make it into a television show?

RQ8: If "reality television" is a misnomer, then what do academics, viewers and media producers and professionals mean when they call something "reality TV"?

RQ9: How do media producers and professionals characterize reality television?

RQ10: How do different groups of media users differ with respect to how they perceive, analyze and characterize reality television programming?

Notes

[1] See Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries*, (1994), p.63; and Brian Winston, *Claiming the Reel*, (1995), p. 170 for an excellent discussion on characteristics of the documentary. Though documentary and reality television share the common characteristic of presenting reality, they are fundamentally different.

[2] The raw footage itself is subjective since the filmmakers/videographers decide what to shoot and, perhaps more importantly, what not to shoot. As a result, their preferences affect the signification process.

[3] Even though Ponech admits that the two terms are not equivalent, he chooses to refer to "non-fiction" film and "documentary" film as though they are.

[4] Another example of a non-fiction film that was created without the filmmaker's intentions to do so is the Rodney King beating. Here, we have a non-fiction film that was created spur of the moment by a man who had no intentions of creating a non-fiction film. He was merely shooting something he thought was unbelievable.

[5] There is some dispute as to who presented the first motion picture. Since, it is of no consequence for our review here when the first film was shown or who developed it, the author prefers not to get tangled in that confusion.

[6] The American *Big Brother* site, hosted and maintained by AOL, is reportedly the longest continually running Webcasting site ever (*Big Brother*, 2000).

[7] For more of Winston's critical arguments against the truth claim of non-fiction programming read his book *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited* (1995).

[8] There has been much confusion surrounding these two terms, mainly because Americans decided to use the term "direct cinema," which is similar to "cinema direct," which is another term used to describe "cinéma vérité." However, direct cinema and cinéma vérité are worlds apart in form and theory.

[9] Winston probably did not originate the "fly on the wall" = direct cinema and "fly in the soup" = cinéma vérité phrases. However, since the author is not aware of where those phrases originated, and since Winston provides no documentation for the phrases, Winston is cited as the source.

[10] Both of these opening quotes were obtained from the following web site on 5/6/00: http://www.sbrowning.com/quotes/index.php3?/keyword=reality+&search_in=2&display=1

[11] It should be noted though that his success in defending the foundational material in his last three chapters determines the efficacy of his main ontological argument. After all, Searle admits, "realism and a correspondence conception are essential presuppositions of any sane philosophy." Thus, how well he defends his view of these "essential presuppositions" will leave an indelible mark on the rest of his endeavors. However, my paper will not assess this latter concern, it is merely stated a possible apprehension for Searle's housekeeping skills.

[12] Searle's presuppositions are listed on pages 150-151 in the text.

[13] Searle uses the terms "realism" and "external realism" interchangeably. According to Searle, he uses "the metaphor "external" to mark the fact that the view in question holds that reality exists outside of, or external to, our system of representation" (1995, p. 154).

[14] This seems to suggest that external realism is not falsifiable. That is, if our representations are all we have to justify or collect evidence with, and the truth of those representations have no effect on the veracity of external realism, then how do we test the theory? Searle tries to give some proof for external realism in Chapter 9, but ultimately concludes that one cannot provide a proof for external realism without presupposing the existence of external realism or relying on empirical data (which of course he has previously shown in Chapter 7 as not reliable). So Searle resorts to maintaining that external realism is a background presupposition. See chapter 9 for a full account of his defense of external realism.

[15] Searle makes other arguments against the conceptual relativist argument against external realism, but due to space considerations only his main refutation will be discussed. For a look at his other refutations, including an interesting one that states that conceptual relativism is not only consistent with, but *presupposes* external relativism, see pages 162-167.

[16] Even though *Unsolved Mysteries* is no longer producing new episodes, old episodes are shown on the Lifetime Network. At the end of a segment, the viewer is prompted to write to a PO Box number with information regarding the case. If the case has since been solved, then there is an "Update" full screen graphic detailing the elucidation of the crime. Thus, despite the fact that the show is no longer in production, someone is still taking in information regarding the unsolved cases and carrying out the interactive element of the show, even after the show.

[17] Perhaps the first caught-on-tape television program was *Candid Camera* with Allen Funt. *Candid Camera* debuted in 1948 and appeared on all three major networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) and is also syndicated (Kloer, 2000, p. G1). The show now makes return appearances on CBS with Allen Funt's son Peter Funt and Suzanne Somers serving as hosts.

[18] The confessional element, first adapted by MTV's *The Real World* and their sister series *Road Rules*, is now utilized by many popular reality programs like *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, *A Dating Story*, and *Making the Band*.

[19] France has also spun off a number of UK-based reality television programs. Invariantly, the emergence of reality TV, no matter what country it shows its head, spawns unease. As such, critics have met French reality television with apprehension, despite the fact that it enjoys an ever-increasing audience. Dauncey explains:

> Some see the new genre of programmes as a contribution to a regrettable lowering of standards towards lowest-common-denominator television (LCDTV) characterized by exhibitionism, audience voyeurism and incitement to inform, and others believe in their empowering qualities for ordinary citizens, but in the short term at least, reality shows now seem here to stay on French screens. (1996, p.85)

[20] And this is for CBS's much less successful non-scripted show. CBS's golden-boy, *Survivor*, enjoyed an audience of 51 million (with a 28.8 rating and a 44 share, just under the top-rated show of the year, *The Super Bowl*, with a 46.3/63) ("*Survivor* Tops" 2000). All across the country, people celebrated the finale of *Survivor* with *Survivor*-theme parties, contests, and camping trips.

[21] Goodwin makes some exceptional (perhaps positive) remarks about the effects of viewing *Rescue 911*:

> *Rescue 911* is interested in effects, not in myth; although that leaves plenty of room to create the myth of its own effects. Some of which are truly bizarre: a woman unknowingly suffering from carbon-monoxide poisoning generated by a faulty gas heater is taken to [a] hospital by her husband. *Rescue 911* comes on the television in the emergency room, featuring a story about a woman who has exactly the same symptoms, as a consequence of inhaling fumes from a gas heater in the home. The couple diagnose the problem on the basis of what they have just seen, and rush home to rescue their children from the brink of death. (1993, p. 27)

Goodwin adds some social commentary to this interesting tale:

> In paranoid, post-imperial America, the family has retreated to the home, where it nests comfortably in front of the television set…only to find that here, too, there are dark threats in every nook and cranny. When the big bad world becomes a place where Americans fear to tread, the home, too, becomes a haven of insecurity. If Saddam doesn't gas you, your cooker will. (1993, p. 27)

[22] The author is not quite sure talk shows (or it's judicially seasoned cousin, Court TV shows) count as reality television programming. Nelson and Robinson give a compelling, first-hand account of how manipulated, scripted and downright mendacious the talk show genre can be. Nelson appeared as an expert guest panelist on "an American nationally syndicated television talk show" and reports that the program offers no more than a "deliberately crafted and stylized depiction of its subject matter" (1994, pp. 56, 71).

[23] One web site devoted to reality-based programming, dramality.TV, hosts a page where you can find out audition information on a slew of reality television shows that either are or soon will be in production. See http://dramality.xoasis.com for a listing of current 'casting' calls, including one for the third *Survivor* series, which will have the winner take a trip to the space station Mir.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGICAL SECTION

> Qualitative researchers cannot feign certainty nor should they claim communion with their subjects. Their goal is simply to render plausible the terms by which groups explain themselves to the world and to clarify the role that mass communication plays in such explanations. The "something" that qualitative research understands is not some set of truisms about communication but the awful difficulties groups face in mapping reality.
>
> Pauly, 1991

The following chapter will detail the research methodology, assumptions, methods, procedures, and rationales for the methods chosen. Before beginning, some prefatory remarks about how the methodology and methods work within the larger theoretical framework of the study are in order. The researcher chose the qualitative approach first and foremost because it corresponds with her ontological and epistemological assumptions about the world, in particular the suppositions that embrace multiple constructions of reality and knowledge. Furthermore, given that the current analysis examines how different groups of media users interpret, analyze and characterize reality television, it makes sense to use a paradigm that allows for dynamic interpretations of reality. Finally, as explicated below the qualitative approach meshes well with the theoretical and methodological standpoints.

It is important to describe not only the methods, methodological assumptions and rationales, but also demonstrate how they correspond to the

overall theoretical structure of the study. Silverman describes seven levels of analysis in qualitative research:[1]

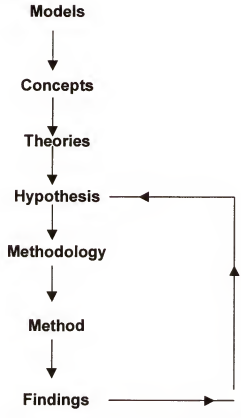

Figure 3: Seven Levels of Analysis, Source: Silverman, 2000, p. 79

Figure 3 illustrates how the seven levels of analysis relate to one another. Models, sometimes referred to as "paradigms," (Lindlof, 1995) provide "an overall framework for how we look at reality" (Silverman, 2000, p. 77). The current analysis draws on the ethnographic model as a theoretical guide.[2] According to Morgan, multimethod studies readily lend themselves to the ethnographic approach, "which has traditionally involved a blend of observation and interviewing" (Morgan, 1997, p. 3). The current study seeks to describe how different people (academics, viewers, media producers and professionals) understand, interpret and characterize a particular phenomenon (reality television

programming). By analyzing these different media users, classes of content, information and processing will emerge, which will ultimately aid in discovering how these groups understand, interpret and characterize reality programming (Lindlof, 1995, p. 56).

The present study fits within the qualitative methodology. As such, there are certain ontological and epistemological assumptions implied by adapting a qualitative methodology.[3] First, qualitative research denies the existence, or at least the efficacy of arguing for the existence, of an external reality. Therefore, a qualitative ontology embraces and attempts to explicate the rich, subjective and unique structures of reality. While quantitative research attempts to eliminate or abate deviant or anomalous data that pulls them farther away from some external, 'objective' or generalizable norm, qualitative research thrives on it.

The qualitative methodology only accepts the existence of individual, internal realities. Thus, the possibility of discovering and claiming knowledge of purely objective truths, truths that exist outside of and independent of human agents, is denied. Instead, the qualitative methodology embraces an epistemology that validates human subjectivity, interaction and multiple interpretations of a singular event. That is not to say that qualitative researchers must value every interpretation equally. There are varying degrees of reliability and value for participant accounts. However, the major epistemological difference between qualitative and quantitative research is that qualitative research is not ultimately interested in producing truths that exist independent of the participants from whom they collected data. On the other hand, quantitative

research strives to produce truths that can be extrapolated beyond the contexts in which they were discovered.

Methods Employed

The current analysis employs four methods. First, a textual analysis of academic literature was used to understand how academics describe the growth, popularity, production, veracity and characteristics reality programming. Second, focus groups were used to grasp how viewers felt about the reality programs they watched, including how they perceived the development of the genre, its production techniques and how those techniques affect content, how one's ontological stance might affect his or her notion of reality television and whether there really is such a thing as "real" reality television programming. Finally, in-depth interviews and document analysis were employed to gain insight into how media producers and industry professionals working with reality programming differentiate it from other non-reality programs, why they feel the genre is becoming so popular and how it developed, what types of production techniques they utilize in creating a reality show and how those techniques affect the authenticity of the text and how they characterize the genre they work with.

The order of data collection, from academics to viewers to producers, moves from the general to the specific. That is, the present study seeks to understand the general comments of academics about reality programs, to the more focused discussions of viewers to the specific comments of producers and industry professionals on particular reality programs. Also, as a practical matter, it was difficult to determine which reality television producers and industry

workers to interview until it was discovered what reality television shows viewers and academics interacted with and understood as "reality TV."

Guided by the ethnographic model, the current study examines phenomena through multiple research techniques that provide rich and detailed data about how different groups of people understand, analyze, interpret and characterize reality programming. Starting with the textual analysis, the following pages provide a description of the method, including the rationale for choosing that particular method and the precise techniques used to collect and analyze data. Before reviewing the methods employed, some prefatory remarks about the qualitative approach to reliability and validity are in order.

Qualitative Approach to Reliability and Validity

Reliability refers to the stability of observations. That is, would two researchers observing the same phenomena produce the same results. However, to apply objectivist standards of reliability and validity to qualitative research misunderstands the goals and merits of qualitative inquiry. In other words, to expect the methods and findings of qualitative research, which are context-dependent, to be transferable to some external population misses the point of qualitative research. Qualitative research does not seek generalizable codes and predictions. All the qualitative researcher observes—the people, the culture, the interactions—is contingent on the context in which the data was collected. It is this unique and rich data that makes qualitative research exceptional. Qualitative researchers value rich, unique, multiple and dynamic

interpretations of reality. Thus, reliability, at least the objectivist notion of reliability, is not a goal for qualitative investigations.

Validity deals with the truth of the observations. That is, validity measures how accurately the researcher reported the findings of the study. Lindlof discusses two types of validity: internal and external (Lindlof 1995, p. 237). Internal validity extends to the confines of the research projects, while external validity measures how well the patterns generalize to populations outside the data set (Lindlof 1995, p. 237-238). Just as with reliability, the qualitative researcher is searching for a different treasure than generalizability. Next, a review of the qualitative paradigm's criteria for trustworthiness is provided.

Trustworthiness Criteria for Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research endures attacks on its unique and distinct approach to examining the world and seeking understanding from it. Lincoln and Guba lay out the charges often thrown against naturalistic studies, including qualitative research:

> The naturalistic inquirer soon becomes accustomed to hearing charges that naturalistic studies are undisciplined; that he or she is guilty of "sloppy" research, engaging in "merely subjective" observations, responding indiscriminately to the "loudest bangs or brightest lights." Rigor, it is asserted, is not the hallmark of naturalism. Is the naturalist inevitable defenseless against such charges? Worse, are they true? (Lincoln 1985, pp 289-290)

Lincoln and Guba give a definitive "no" to both questions posed above. They start by explaining that traditionally in the social sciences there have been four criteria used to evaluate the merit of research: internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. Above are the four tenants of non-qualitative research. Critics of

qualitative research have long argued that there is no merit to qualitative studies because they do not achieve internal and external validity. Perhaps, some have refuted, that is because validity criteria are inappropriate measures for evaluating qualitative work. Denzin and Lincoln explain the traditional notions of validity and offer up the concept of trustworthiness as a replacement:

> Some analysts argue that *validity* may be an inappropriate term in a critical research context, as it simply reflects a concern for acceptance within a positivist concept of research rigor. To a critical researcher, validity means much more than the traditional definitions of internal and external validity usually associated with the concept. Traditional research has defined *internal validity* as the extent to which a researcher's observations and measurements are true descriptions of a particular reality; *external validity* has been defined as the degree to which such descriptions can be accurately compared with other groups. *Trustworthiness*, many have argued, is a more appropriate word to use in the context of critical research. It is helpful because it signifies a different set of assumptions about research purposes than does *validity*. (Denzin & Lincoln 1994, p. 151)

Lincoln and Guba outline the assumptions of trustworthy qualitative research and contrast them with their non-qualitative counterparts.

Qualitative	**Non-Qualitative**
CREDIBILITY	Internal Validity
TRANSFERABILITY	External Validity
DEPENDABILITY	Reliability
CONFIRMABILITY	Objectivity

Figure 4: Comparison of Trustworthiness and Validity Criteria, Source: Lincoln & Guba[4]

Lincoln and Guba discuss each criterion and explicate steps qualitative researchers can take to ensure that they are achieving results that are credible,

transferable, dependable, and can be confirmed. Two criteria employed in the current analysis will be outlined: triangulation and negative case analysis.[5] Triangulation and negative case analysis helps achieve credible, dependable and confirmable results.

First, triangulation involves comparing data on one topic by at least three different means. There are three different ways one can triangulate: (1) multiple sources; (2) multiple methods; and (3) multiple investigators (Lindlof 1995, p. 239). The present study looks at multiple sources (academics, media users and media industry/producers) and multiple methods (textual analysis, focus groups, in-depth interviews and document analysis). Collecting data from multiple sources in multiple ways helps to resist easy interpretations. Instead, one must examine a particular phenomena from multiple points of view, which enriches the data, allowing credible and plausible insights from the observations to emerge.

Second, a negative case analysis was utilized. Here, a hypothesis is developed through some inductive practice. For the current study, the constant comparative method is the inductive process being employed. As data are collected the researcher compares or tests the hypothesis. If the new data confirm the hypothesis, then the hypothesis is confirmed, but not proven. If the data disconfirm the hypothesis, then the researcher must adjust the hypothesis to accommodate the data.

Thus, by using triangulation of methods and sources and employing a negative case analysis, the qualitative researcher is able to obtain trustworthy and credible results. While qualitative researchers are not interested in objective

codes and predications, they are interested in creating rules of behavior that other researchers, who are examining similar contexts, can employ as guides to their investigations. In other words, qualitative researchers strive for transferability of findings. Let us now look briefly at Lincoln and Guba's transferability guidelines.

Transferability is very different from its conventionalist counterpart external validity. Lincoln and Guba explain

> [T]he naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility . . . . Clearly, not just any descriptive data will do, but the criteria that separate relevant from irrelevant descriptors are still largely undefined . . . .The naturalist inquirer is also responsible for providing the widest possible range of information for inclusion in the thick description . . . (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 316)

Lincoln and Guba stress that it is not the qualitative researcher's "responsibility to provide an *index* of transferability; it *is* his or her responsibility to provide the *data base* that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers" (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 316). In fact, it is impossible for a researcher to know whether or not his or her data is transferable to some other study in the future because the researcher is ignorant of the specific context in which the subsequent study is taking place. Therefore, qualitative researchers must provide the tools (data) for future researchers to determine whether or not transferability applies.

With issues of validity, reliability, credibility, trustworthiness and transferability explicated, the next step is to examine the methods employed in the current analysis.

Textual Analysis

Traditionally, a qualitative textual analysis involves looking at a small number of texts and documents with the aim of producing rich and contextual categories of content. The present study utilizes textual analysis as a data collection method, but in a slightly different way. Like the traditional qualitative textual analysis, text was gathered on a particular range of subjects; however, the aim was not to produce categories of content. Rather, the textual analysis of previous academic research on reality television, documentary and non-fiction programming enabled the researcher to interpret a synthesized account of how academics critically analyze, understand and characterize reality programming.

Because academics publish their ideas, their interpretations, in academic journals and books, it makes sense to look there for data on how academics critically examine, interpret and characterize reality programming. By looking at multiple sources, the researcher is attempting to build an understanding of how one culture, academics, interprets a text, namely, reality programming. Given that there are no previous studies that attempt to interpret reality programming, the research net was cast out a little further to encompass documentary and non-fiction programming. Granted, documentary and non-fiction programming are not synonymous with reality programming, however, the researcher is compiling the data that currently is available. With the tremendous boom in reality programming

and viewership, one can expect a corresponding growth in academic research in this area. For now, research on reality television's cousins documentary and non-fiction programming must suffice.

Interviews with academics were not conducted for several important reasons. Since there are no strong reality television scholars, ones who are on the cutting edge of this new area of research, it would be difficult to justify why one academic was interviewed over another. By performing a textual analysis the pool of data need not be limited to just the academics interviewed. Thus, assimilating the relevant articles written on documentary and non-fiction programming is more feasible than conducting interviews. [6]

Another concern is that since reality programming is such a new and growing topic it is difficult to keep on top of the material that is published on reality television. In the popular culture sector the literature abounds on reality television and the textual analysis includes popular culture texts, particularly those that cite academics working within popular culture. Unlike the popular culture sector, things move significantly slower in the publishing world of academia. Therefore, it is believed that no academic articles have been missed. However, missing some important piece of data is not unique concern of the textual analysis. No matter what data collection method one employs, they must always contend with the possibility of missed data.

Because the current study embraces the qualitative paradigm, the goal is not to produce a permanent taxonomy of reality television programming. Rather, this study serves as a cornerstone, a beginning point, for a new body of

research. Therefore, it is imperative at the outset to distinguish the differences between qualitative and quantitative textual analyses. Silverman distinguishes the difference between quantitative and qualitative textual analyses:

> Quantitative researchers try to analyse written material in a way which will produce reliable evidence about a large sample. Their favoured method is 'content analysis' in which the researchers establish a set of categories and then count the number of instances that fall into each category. The crucial requirement is that the categories are sufficiently precise to enable different coders to arrive at the same results when the same body of material (e.g. newspaper headlines) is examined.
>
> In qualitative research, small numbers of texts and documents may be analysed for a very different purpose. The aim is to understand the participants' categories and to see how these are used in concrete activities. . . . The theoretical orientation of many qualitative researchers thus means that they are more concerned with the processes through which texts depict 'reality' than with whether such texts contain true or false statements. (2000, p. 128)

The textual analysis began by examining two broad categories of academic texts—documentary, non-fiction, and realism. From these wide-ranging areas, consistent themes occurring in the academic research were identified. Next, several articles that addressed reality television programming, but did not attempt to specifically interpret it were examined. No texts that specifically addressed how reality programming is or should be characterized were found.[7] Reoccurring perceptions of the development, growth and popularity of reality television programming were found. In addition, ideas of how academics critically analyzed reality television, including discussion of the production techniques, signification of the referent, and critical interpretations and characteristics of reality television programming were identified. Finally, the broad notions documentary, non-fiction, and realism were combined with the extrapolated

findings of reality programming to create a synthesized account of how academics understand, interpret and categorize reality television programming.

Focus Groups

Focus groups with adult media users were conducted to help understand how they interpret, understand and characterize reality programming. Morgan defines the focus group method as the following:

> As a form of qualitative research, focus groups are basically group interviews, although not in the sense of an alternation between a researcher's questions and the research participant's responses. Instead, the reliance is on interaction within the group, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher who typically takes the role of a moderator. The hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group. (1997, p. 2)

It is through the interactions between media users that the researcher hopes to gain insight into how users make sense of reality television programming. By conducting focus groups, the researcher has the potential to extract data that cannot be obtained through observations or one-on-one interviews. As such, the focus group serves as the only qualitative method that harvests the rich and enlightening exchanges between participants. Thus, by utilizing the unique and valuable assets of the focus group, the researcher anticipates collecting interesting and thought-provoking data about how media users interpret and characterize reality television programming.

One of the benefits to conducting focus groups is that the researcher will be able to explore and question many participants at one time. Thus, focus groups allow the researcher to "produce concentrated amounts of data on precisely the topic of interest" (Morgan, 1997, p. 12). On the other hand, by

grouping participants together, the researcher could lose some of the individual responses that are valuable. Participants might feel uncomfortable discussing ideas that do not conform to the norm. Thus, the group could "influence the nature of the data it produces" (Morgan, 1997, p. 15). As the moderator, the researcher must be aware of inhibited participants and create an atmosphere where all the participants feel like their contributions are valuable and respected. In addition, the researcher will make herself available to any and all participants to discuss privately their thoughts on the subject.

Five focus groups were conducted, with each group ranging between six and ten homogeneous participants within each group. The number and size of the focus groups fall within Morgan's "rules of thumb" (1997, p 34). According to Morgan, the "basis for the rule of thumb that projects should consist of three to five groups comes from a claim that more groups seldom provide meaningful new insights" (1997, p. 43).

The size and composition of focus groups depends largely on the type of interaction one wants to emerge. According to Morgan, smaller groups might have trouble sustaining an active level of involvement (1997, p. 35). Conversely, the involvement in large groups may be difficult to manage (Morgan, 1997, p. 35). Thus, an attempt was made to formulate focus groups that fell somewhere between the norm range of six to ten. In anticipation of no-shows, Morgan's guidelines of over-recruiting by 20 percent were followed (1997, p. 42).

All participants were recruited from a large, undergraduate, core-curriculum course at the University of Florida. Students outside the College of

Journalism and Mass Communications were used to minimize bias and priming. College undergraduates were selected because they represent one of the most targeted viewing audiences of reality programming (Carter, 2000).

For their participation, students received extra credit points in their class. Participants were between 18 to their mid-20s. Participants who are in a similar age bracket and attending the same University were used so that they would feel comfortable discussing and interacting with one another. Moreover, the composition helped create and sustain healthy interactions among participants (Lindlof, 1995, p. 174; Morgan, 1997, p. 36). To further foster a relaxed and cooperative atmosphere, the focus groups were conducted in a neutral location.

The focus groups took place from November 16 through December 1, 2000. The schedule for the five focus groups was as follows:

Week One: (1) Thursday (transcription on Friday and Saturday)
(2) Friday (transcription on Saturday and Sunday)
Week Two: (3) Tuesday (transcription on Wednesday and Thursday)
Week Three: (4) Tuesday (transcription on Wednesday and Thursday)
(5) Thursday (transcription on Friday and Saturday)

The lapse in time between interviews (with the exception of interviews 1 and 2) allows the researcher to transcribe a focus group in total before proceeding to the next focus group. Lindlof (1995) and Morgan (1997) strongly recommend transcribing while still in the field so that the feel for each group can be captured accurately in the field notes. Finally, the schedule keeps the moderator fresh and prevents enervation and confusion between respective

groups. All of the focus groups were videotaped to aid the transcription process and to closely capture the overall feel of the group and the non-verbal interactions among participants.

Topics of focus group discussion

The topics addressed during the focus group discussion can be loosely categorized into the following areas:

(1) The development and popularity of reality television programming;

(2) The production techniques of reality television programming, how they differ from non-reality programs and the effects production techniques have on viewer's perceptions;

(3) The spectrum of reality television programming from real to less real and if there can be a totally "real" reality program;

(4) The believability of reality television programming;

(5) The ontology of reality television programs and how one's individual ontology affects one's interpretation of reality television programming; and

(6) The characteristics of reality television programming.

The moderator of the focus group opened and guided the discussion. A balance between high and low moderator involvement was maintained, depending on needs of each particular group (Morgan, 1997, p. 48). The researcher preferred to let each individual group implicitly communicate how involved they needed the moderator to be. Before group interaction began, the informed consent process

was reviewed and comprehension of the process by the participants was assured before they agreed and signed the informed consent document (see Appendix B).

Next, the topic was introduced and a discussion of why reality television programming merited their attention was given. In addition, a few ground rules for the focus group were given. Once the short introduction was complete, discussion began by the participants first introducing themselves with an "ice-breaker" question to get the group loosened up (e.g. Tell us your name, your major, and your favorite television show.). A question guide was then used to facilitated discussion and interaction (see Appendix C).

In-depth Interviews & Document Analysis

In-depth interviews and document analysis were utilized to gain insight into how producers and industry professionals working with reality television understand, create, analyze and characterize the form. In-depth interviews allow the researcher to speak one-on-one with participants about how they interpret reality programming. According to McCracken, the "long interview is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory" because it "can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world . . . . The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves" (1988, p. 9). Producers and industry professionals working with reality programming content were interviewed in order to tap into the professional and cultural contexts of the media industry.[8] All interviews were conducted over

the phone and tape-recorded for transcription. Interviews were conducted from February to May, depending solely on the availability of the interviewees. Employing the constant comparative method, the interviews were transcribed, analyzed and categorized immediately after the data was collected.

Interviews are limited by the interviewer's ability to extract useful data from participants. Participants also must be willing to share their insights openly with a virtual stranger. It is up to the interviewer to create and foster an inviting and open forum for the participants so that they will share as much as possible with the interviewer.

The researcher opened and guided the discussion and attempted to strike a balance between formality and informality (McCracken, 1988, p. 26). The informed consent and interview guide can be found in Appendix D and E, respectively.

A document analysis was performed to further uncover how media producers and industry professionals understand, create, analyze and characterize reality television. Documents serve as traces of human behavior (Hall & Rist, 1999, p. 301). Document analysis serves as the study of these traces through the careful examination of pertinent documents. According to Hall and Rist, when performing a document analysis one begins by gathering information from transcripts, e-mail correspondence, television programming, diaries, or other sources and "abstract from it key themes, strategies, values, messages, and the like" (1999, p. 302). Lindlof asserts that documents are meaningful to analysts:

> To the analyst, documents are very important because they are the "paper trail" left by events and processes. Documents indicate, among other things, what an organization *produces* and how it *certifies* certain kinds of activities (e.g. a license or a deed), *categorizes* events or people (e.g. a membership list), *codifies* procedures or policies (e.g. rules for using equipment), *instructs* a readership (e.g. an operating manual), *explains* past or future actions (e.g. memoranda), and *tracks* its own activities (e.g. minutes of meetings). More reflexively, an organization or group will sometimes put out documents that *memorialize* its own history or achievements (e.g. yearbooks, stockholders' reports, press releases. (1995, p. 208)

The present study examined a wide array of documents from several different sources, including network transcripts, network chat room discussion transcripts, network press releases, biographies, a report and an organizational rule book. Source checks were performed on all documents obtained and in most cases the documents were obtained directly from the person or organization releasing the information. Therefore, the documents analyzed were from credible and trustworthy sources.

Document analysis served as an excellent data collection method because it allowed the researcher to collect, organize and categorize written information and compare it to other data, both in the document analysis pool and the in-depth interview pool. In some instances, it was possible to compare data from the same informant through both methods (in-depth interview and document analysis). It was extremely useful to have the documented sources to see if the informant had altered his or her views in any way. Thus, working together, the document analysis and in-depth interviews served as complementary data

collection tools, which allowed the researcher to discover how media producers and industry professionals interpret and portray reality television programming.

Four in-depth interviews were conducted, two with media producers of reality programming and two with media industry professionals who either oversee and/or critically analyze reality television content. Several documents from a multitude of sources were analyzed, including network press releases, web chat transcripts, television transcripts, the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and the Museum of Television and Radio. Data collection ceased when the researcher achieved saturation.

The following broad areas were covered throughout the in-depth interviews and examined during the document analysis:

(1) The development, growth and popularity of reality television programming;

(2) The production techniques used, how they differ from non-reality programs and their affect on the veracity of the referent;

(3) The use of real individuals: treatment, validity, and audience response;

(4) Authenticity issues of reality television programming and if "real" reality television programming is possible;

(5) The characteristics of reality television programming

Data analysis

The constant comparative method was employed to analyze data. According to Lindlof, there are two features of the constant comparative method:

(1) It specifies the means by which theory grounded in relationships among data emerges through the management of coding (hence, *grounded theory*); and

(2) It shows explicitly how to code and conceptualize as field data keep flowing in. (1995, pp.222-223)

Thus, as Lindlof notes, the constant comparative method blends all four elements of analysis: process, reduction, explanation, and theory (1995, p. 223). The four elements of analysis are carried out through three steps in the constant comparative method process.

During the first stage, incidents are compared that are applicable to categories. Using intuition at first, the researcher categorizes data-text incidents. When considering a new incident, the researcher continuously compares it to other categories to determine "its goodness of fit" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 223). "This process," according to Lindlof, "marks the overt emergence of a theoretical sensibility" (1995, p. 223). At some point during the categorization process the researcher begins to integrate categories and their properties. Lindlof explains that the "analyst writes a *memo* that elaborates on the coding category as it currently exists" (1995, p. 223). As a result, explicit rules are developed for inclusion into a category.

Next, the process of integration changes the nature of categories from intuitive collections of coded incidents to constructs, which brings the researcher closer to creating a deep understanding of the data at hand (Lindlof, 1995, p. 224). Lindlof describes the integration process:

> It is a dialectical process. As the analyst integrates incidents with like features into properties, he or she uses these properties to verify whether or not incidents should stay in particular categories. The analyst has more confidence in assigning incidents to

> categories as new data come in. The purpose of seeking new data is to test the viability and value of the integrated categories and their increasingly better-defined properties. (1995, p. 224)

The final stage of the constant comparative method involves delimiting the theory. This is the time when the set becomes "theoretically saturated" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 224). That is, additional data add little to what has already been coded, integrated and conceptualized. "What is reduced," Lindlof notes, "are not the data, but the terminology and the categories that are necessary for a focused, selective accounting of the phenomena" (1995, p. 224). As a result, the constant comparative method provides a process by which the researcher can categorize and understand data inductively through a series of steps that increase the researcher's understanding and confidence in the findings.

Summary

The present study employs four research strategies to determine how three integral components of the media process—media scholars, media consumers and the media industry— understand, critical evaluate, interpret and characterize reality television programming. First, a textual analysis of academic research on documentary, non-fiction, and reality television programming was conducted to discover academics' perceptions of the development, growth and popularity of reality television programming. Moreover notion of how academics critically examined reality television programming, including their ideas on production techniques, signification of the referent, and critical interpretations and characteristics of reality television programming were discovered. Second, focus groups with adult media users captured the unique, rich and insightful

interactions viewers have when discussing their views concerning the development, popularity, production, variety, veracity, characteristics and ontology of reality television programming. Third, in-depth interviews with producers and media industry professionals brought their experiences and perceptions concerning the growth, viewership, production, authenticity and characteristics of reality television to light. Finally, document analysis enriched and added to the data from media producers and professionals about how they think about, produce and critically analyze reality television programming.

Research questions 1 and 2, which deal specifically with how academics characterize and distinguish reality programming from other types of programming, will be answered by the textual analysis. Research questions 4 and 7, which deal exclusively with how viewers critically evaluate and interpret reality programming, will be answered by the focus groups. Research question 9, which asks how media producers and professional characterize reality programming, will be answered by the in-depth interviews and document analysis. The remaining research questions, 3,5, 6, 8, and 10, which deal with the development, growth, popularity, degrees, veracity, production, and ontology of reality television programming, will be answered utilizing all four data collection methods since these questions are posed to all three groups of media users.

The researcher assumes that collecting data from different types of people and sources will create a more substantive and comprehensive understanding of reality programming. In addition, academics, viewers, and media professionals and producers of reality programming bring unique and valuable contributions to

the interpretative process. Thus, different methods are employed to garner different qualitative results for each individual participant group. In sum, the various methods allow the researcher to extract the data needed to grasp how different media users understand, evaluate, interpret and characterize reality television programming.

Notes

[1] While Silverman's schematic model of analysis is functional, it suffers from its simplicity. The researcher contends that the interaction between one's methodology, methods, theories, concepts and hypotheses can run in both directions. That is, unlike Silverman's diagram, one's methodology can provide useful concepts, which in turn correspond to one's chosen theory, which serves as a basis for one's methods, and so on. For example, employing a qualitative methodology provides the researcher with all sorts of conceptual tools (e.g. notions of participants, researcher's roles/obligations, and qualitative ontology). Thus, the relation between these seven levels of analysis is not so much linear, but more free flowing and continually negotiated.

[2] Both Lindlof and Silverman refer to symbolic interactionism as a model; it is also referred to as a theoretical perspective or approach (Blumer, 1969; Budd, 1979; West, 2000). Here the lines between approach, model, theory and paradigm get a bit muddled. The blurring is inevitable because these models, concepts and theoretical frameworks feed from the same philosophical pool. As such, please keep in mind that while the researcher utilizes symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective it is also employed, and glimpses can be detected in the present analysis, as a model or paradigm.

[3] For a thorough discussion concerning the ontological and epistemological framework implied by using a qualitative model see Chapter 2, section two, "The Social Construction of Reality." The researcher discusses the nature of reality and what we can know about reality. Also, a defense of the qualitative perspective concerning reality and intellectual investigation is offered.

[4] Lincoln and Guba do not present these criteria in a chart; however, the author finds comparison tables useful guides and has taken the liberty to construct one here.

[5] For a more detailed discussion on all for criteria, please see Lincoln and Guba's chapter on "Establishing Trustworthiness" in *Naturalistic Inquiry*.

[6] Subsequent studies will involve interviews with academics, but not until the field of research has grown a bit.

[7] However, the author did find a few newspaper and popular culture articles that asserted that the term "reality television" is a misnomer.

[8] The researcher utilized in-depth interviews and document analysis with media professionals for another, more practical, reason, namely, that media professionals' schedules are very tight and it would be extremely difficult, probably impossible, to get several industry officials together at the same time to sit down for a focus group discussion. In addition, many big wigs working in media production were not available for interviewing; however, they had granted interviews to the press and other sources, which the author obtained transcripts of to use in the document analysis.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

> Television isn't real. It's a contradiction. It's an oxymoron. The reality is that I can change the channel if I don't like it. In reality you can't change the channel.
>
> Focus Group Participant (PC)

Focus group participants were 71% female (F=20, M=8) and ranged in age from 18 to mid-twenties and all were college undergraduates. In-depth interview participants were 75% male (M=3, F=1) and working within the media industry. Two participants work together on numerous reality television programs. One in-depth interview participant is a writer for an international media publication. The final in-depth interview participant works in a governing role for the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences.

General Findings

The academics, viewers and media producers and professionals used in this study agree that reality television has been around much longer than the term it denotes. Many traced its roots back to *Candid Camera*, citing it as one of the first reality television programs. The popularity and growth of reality shows was attributed to both artistic and economic factors. Many believed that reality television offered something new to a television line-up inundated with sitcoms and dramas. Others acknowledged that reality programming is substantially less expensive to produce than its fictional counterparts. These academics, viewers,

media producers and professionals all recognized that reality television contains many production techniques that may detract from its authenticity. However, they understood that many of these elements, like the editing of footage, are done to enhance the viewing experience. Several different ideas emerged concerning the nature of reality television programming. However, there were general characteristics that all three groups, academics, viewers and producers mentioned, namely, that reality television programming is unscripted, uses real people and shows real, unrehearsed reactions to events.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section reveals the results of the textual analysis of academic literature. The second section examines the focus group data with reality television viewers. Findings from the in-depth interviews with media producers and professionals and the document analysis are discussed in the third section. In addition, each section is divided into subsections and each subsection answers related research questions, denoted as RQ1, RQ2, and so on.

Textual Analysis

Results from the textual analysis of academic data are organized into three sections. First, discussion of reality television's popularity and notions of actuality are analyzed. This provides an overview of how reality television has developed into the popular, broad and unwieldy genre of today (RQ2, RQ3). Second, signification of reality through signifiers is explicated. Understanding how signifiers stand in for reality aids the comprehension of how reality television

stands in for referents through its programming (RQ10). Finally, characteristics of reality programming are discussed (RQ1).

Reality television and its roots

Long before *Survivor* or *Temptation Island*, academics maintain there was always reality television. According to Dwight Brooks, "before the current crop there was *COPS* and *America's Most Wanted*," and prior to that there was "*America's Funniest Home Videos* and...*Candid Camera*" (Leopold 2001, p.2). "We've always had reality TV," Brooks concludes, "just in different forms" (Leopold 2001, p. 2). However, according to Robert Thompson, director of Syracuse University's Center for the Study of Popular Television, reality television "thrives on reality that's contrived" (Leopold 2001, p. 2).

Given the nature of television, production techniques borrowed from documentary are quickly being replaced with "story-telling conventions of popular television" (Curtin 1993, p. 19). Thus, what the viewers receive is not so much *the* reality, but rather the producer's interpretation of reality. Curtin explains how editing and other techniques are used to create "actualities":

> Editing and camera techniques also suggested the malleable nature of the medium. Indeed, these techniques helped to generate debate over what is commonly referred to in the industry as "actuality," that is, material captured by photographic or audio equipment which "documents' the analysis of the producer. (Curtin 1993, p. 19)

Thus, reality television programs offer a view of how the producer sees the people and events captured on film. Even though it is based on real events and people, the producer's interpretation of reality is still created. Despite the fact that reality television deals with construed actualities, viewers are invited to enter a

world of narrative that seems devoid of the author's efforts to shape it (Curtin 1993, p.20).

The signified and signifier

During the reality television narrative, viewers are presented with many representations or symbols of real objects, persons and events. The image presented on the screen is the *signifier* for the referent or *signified* which resides in the actual world (Fiske & Hartley, 1992, p. 38). For example, a strip of film that projects the image of Tina Wesson (winner from *Survivor II*) is the signifier for the real Tina Wesson. In other words, Tina Wesson is the signified, the filmic representation of Tina Wesson is the signifier. Moreover, there are many different ways the signifier can depict meaning.

Fiske and Hartley claim that signifiers can be iconic or arbitrary (1992, p. 38-40). A signifier is iconic if "there is a natural relation between the signifier and signified" (Fiske & Hartley, 1992, p. 38). Thus, a picture of an alligator is iconic if it represents the appearance of the alligator. Furthermore, showing a manipulated image of an alligator, in which his scales are orange, would still signify *an* alligator, but would not serve as an iconic symbol of *the* alligator filmed. Moreover, as the number of manipulations increases, the image of the alligator becomes less iconic and more arbitrary" (Fiske & Hartley, 1992, p. 39). A signifier is arbitrary when its meaning is given by some language user(s). For example, a picture of a lit torch does not naturally (or iconically) represent life; however, Jeff Probst, the host of *Survivor*, relates the signifier (a lit torch) with life within the tribe by ceremoniously putting out the castaway's torch who has been

kick out of the tribe at tribal council. In doing so, Probst signifies the end of the castaway" life on *Survivor.* Hence, the image of a lit torch arbitrarily represents life to the castaways and viewers watching the show.

Reality television claims that its symbols are authentic significations of objects (Fiske & Hartley, 1992, p. 164). In addition, realism professes to give its viewers "the knowledge of things;" an unbiased and trustworthy view into the unknown (Fiske & Hartley, 1992, p. 164). Therefore, reality programs do not simply present a producer's way of seeing things, but rather *the* way of seeing things (Fiske & Hartley, 1992, p. 165). However, Fiske and Hartley (1992) argue that reality television programs are not natural documents of events (p. 38, 165). The accuracy of signification is affected by editing, music, voice-over narration, commercials, and sound/image sweetening of the raw footage (Rush 1990, p. 5). Many of these procedures are not noticed by the viewer, yet they often enhance the viewing pleasure and popularity of reality television programs.

Hence, reality programs integrate documentary and conventional dramatic production techniques to transform the signified (reality) into iconic and arbitrary signifiers. Iconic signification attempts to present the referent, the signifier as it is in reality. By utilizing arbitrary signification, producers are able to create signifiers that enhance the viewing experience.

Characteristics of reality television programming

Cavender and Fishman (1998) claim that a basic and reoccurring characteristic of reality television programming is that it claims to present reality. However, recent characterizations of reality television are more skeptical of its

actuality. Thompson describes reality programming as "half fiction, half reality" (Leopold 2001, p.2). Reality shows are half fiction, according to Thompson, because they are using a "universe" that is "contrived" and half reality because they are populating that universe with "non-actors" (Leopold 2001, p. 2).

Joseph Turow, argues that "networks create an assumption that what's presented is essentially as it happened" (Levine 2001, p. 2). However, Turow contends that the term "reality television" is a misnomer because "it's all scripted one way or another" (Levine 2001, p. 2). It is unclear what exactly Turow means, whether he is referring to the contrived settings that many reality programs use as the backdrop for their shows or that the actual characters somehow are given direction on how to 'act' in front of the camera.

When Mark Burnett admitted to using body doubles and reshooting footage for *Survivor*, he received an outpouring of criticism (Buncombe 2001; DeMarco 2001; Huff 2001). Thompson contends that Burnett's actions were a mistake because using staged footage crossed the line of appropriateness (Huff 2001, p. 4). However, the ethical and professional boundaries for reality television are blurry. According to Thompson:

> I have no problem with them dropping in a shot of a crocodile they got two months ago, but showing body doubles in a swimming competition is a little different. There's a sense that this may have gone over that line, whatever that line is. (Huff 2001, p. 4)

Thus, Thompson condemns Burnett's actions and believes that he may have crossed a line; however, given the fuzziness of the genre, Thompson is still unsure where or even what that line exactly is.

Academics agree that reality television programming has been around for quite some time, but that it is now enjoying a tremendous growth in viewership and programming. In addition, academics distinguish this new, incredibly popular branch of reality television from its *Candid Camera* and *An American Family* roots. Contemporary reality television programs seemlessly blend documentary techniques, capturing real people as the react to events, and conventional dramatic techniques like editing, sound and image sweetening, and staged footage. Thus, the academics studied here characterize reality television as an unscripted drama that is half real—using real people—and half unreal—using contrived situations.

Focus Group

Results from the five focus groups conducted with reality television viewers are divided topically into seven sections. The seven categories of content emerged through transcribing, examining, and reviewing data. The first section examines viewers' skepticism of reality television (RQ10). The second section analyzes comments made by two camps of thought about *The Real World* and *Survivor* (RQ5). The third section looks at how viewers would construct a real reality television show (RQ7). The fourth section lays out the various characteristics viewers attributed to reality television programs (RQ4). The fifth section examines some of the production and marketing techniques viewers believe reality television shows employ (RQ6). The sixth section looks at the ontological assumptions and ideas viewers have concerning how reality television programming is characterized (RQ10). The seventh section explores

the effects the focus group had on viewers. A dashed line is used between excerpts to indicate that the preceding comments were not contiguous with the subsequent comment. Comments are grouped together topically and are put next to each other to illustrate a point; however, unless participants' comments are next to each other without a divider, readers should understand that these comments were not made at the same time or even within the same focus group.

"As close as you can get TV"

Viewers of reality television showed diverse and dynamic points of view. One general finding that arose consistently was that reality television was not "really real," but it was as close as you could get to being real on television.

> JP: Maybe a better term for real TV is "as real as it can get TV."
>
> NA: I think it's as real as you're gonna get on TV. Like *The Real World*, it doesn't differ like a whole lot from real life like when people hang out together. It's just not a huge difference. It's just as real as you're gonna get on TV.

Hence, some viewers recognize that "totally real reality TV" is unachievable given the constraints of the television medium (producers, cameras, advertising, editing, ratings, etc.). In addition, this seemed acceptable to many viewers because they contended that the term "reality television" was socially constructed, a pop-culture creation.

> MB: "Reality TV" is just a heading, a pop culture term, that…it's not reality, reality. Yes, it happened, it's edited, it's not scripted and that's reality TV. It could be guided and things are exaggerated and there's exceptional circumstances, but that's "reality TV."…Reality TV is just a term. It doesn't mean that it's actual reality. It's real people. It's edited and guided.

> PW: If you want to define reality TV as real to life, then there's no reality TV, but I don't think that reality TV has to be real to life it's more of a just non-scripted.

Despite their awareness that reality television is not "really real," viewers are able to let down their ontological guard and take in the show's content.

> MB: Compared to watching like a regular TV show like *Friends*, *ER*, whatever, then you're like "Oh yeah, that's actually happening." But then, in the back of your mind you're like "Well, maybe not really." But, still you sort of let yourself go with it.

In fact, some viewers, especial those who were very fond of a particular show, insisted that their show was real, while at the same time arguing that the other shows, ones they had little or no interest in viewing, were less real.

> MS: I don't know, I don't think of *The Real World* as acting. I think of it as real. I mean they are real people in real life.

> KK: I feel like, *Real World* and *Road Rules* are cool to watch cuz there's like younger people doing stuff that we like, like she [KC] says, but *Survivor,* like I'll always miss *Real World*, but I'll always watch *Survivor*, because you're always caught on the edge of your seat to see who's going to get it. Like you watch it with your friends, we use to bet, like who's going to get kicked off. I mean, I thought it was stupid at the end when that dude came up and they had that whole tribal thing, but I thought the show was exciting. I think the *Real World* is cool too, but I think they had a lot of stupid added stuff into it, like, and *Survivor* always had something cool…

Of course, *Survivor* has "added stuff" to it as well, including, as KK mentions, the "whole tribal thing" where a manufactured tribal council is staged every episode. However, it seems that KK does not register or recognize that the element she is using to criticize other reality shows is pervasively present on *Survivor*, admittedly her favorite reality show.

The Real World vs. *Survivor*

On several occasions the group was split between *Real World* and *Survivor* viewers, each maintaining the their show was more reality based than the other. The two participants below were *Survivor* fans. A question was posed to the group about where particular shows fit on a spectrum of reality television shows, from more real to less real. JP began by commenting on how he would subdivide reality television from more to less real. Notice how the second participant jumps in by talking about which shows are more and less real, but then ends up discussing which shows are more interesting for her personally to watch.

> JP: I guess I'd characterize your *Road Rules* and *Real World* as your least reality based. Because you've just got these people put in a comfortable position to where you never know if they have some underlying motive to why they're there and maybe they did just want to be filmed to make money doing whatever they do and they're just trying to promote something of their own accord. Uh, I guess then the next step down would be something like *Survivor* where you're put in an extreme situation where even if you have an ulterior motive, you still have to act your own to survive basically. The going out and getting food, the forming of an alliance. Um, and then the next step is where the person does not know that they're being filmed. I guess that's where the ethical issues come in.
>
> KK: . . . I agree with him [JP], with the three levels and the order. If you're going to record someone without anyone there it's against their constitutional rights or whatever, and I guess you can just throw everything else as to what's reality TV. You can break up reality TV into further subdivisions and you can have like extreme reality TV, when you're thrown into extreme situations, like you're thrown out in the desert and you have to survive. . . and I think the money was just an added incentive because who would want to go? That would be a way to get a million bucks and see who could survive. That was the whole point of the show. But as for me, my opinion, and what I prefer to watch, I prefer to watch something that's more exciting. To me, *Survivor*'s more adventurous, it's like

more of an adventurous type show whereas *Real World*'s more like, I don't know, a basic thing to watch.

Critics of *Survivor* were quick to retort. They mentioned that *Survivor* players were fighting for a million dollars and that this distorted the reality of the show.

KC: I think people are more apt to act normal in a familiar environment. Like, I think people are acting crazy on *Survivor*.

AZ: They're on their guard too much…

KC: Yeah, yeah and I just think the whole reality part is thrown out the window when they get the money involved. Like *Real World*, yeah they're giving you money to live, but I don't think they give you cash, but they pay for you to live. That would be like a scholarship here. It's the same thing, pretty much, kind of. I mean, they're telling you where to live and what to do, kinda, same thing. So, I think when they throw money in there, it changes a lot of stuff. I think *Real World*'s more reality than *Survivor*. And on top of that, on *Survivor*, there's fighting for like who's the strongest, who's the best, who's the. . . I don't wanna get kicked off. . . and they do crazy, crazy things that they would never do probably if they were in a normal environment. Like they wouldn't just go outside and start eating some bugs or something.

KK: See, I think just the opposite of what they're saying…

GROUP LAUGHS

A few moments later in the conversation:

AZ: I think that, I don't know, that's just cuz there's a million dollars so therefore it's not really reality because say you put those people in like. . . where ever, they're jobs and stuff and there's nothing for them to gain. Do you [KK] really think…

JP: But see that's where the extreme situation comes in because you get to what they're really all about.

KC: But then if you, what if you took all the *Survivor* people and put them in *Real World*? Do you think you'd get the same thing?

> JP: No because there wouldn't be anything at stake. You know they're lives are not at stake, a million dollars is not at stake, I mean…
>
> KC: Exactly so what's real?

This was a frequent occurrence. It seemed as though participants had a difficult time distinguishing between what is more real and what is more interesting to watch.

> AZ: So, of course, I would want to go to a place and have my rent paid for, for how ever long I'm there so that's like their reality and they just get a couple of benefits thrown in. But as far as like, like I said before, *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, they kind of like, it's too "do this, do this, do this." Like, with *Big Brother*, they're like "such, and such is gonna get kicked off today." I don't really like either *Survivor* or *Big Brother*, just not interesting to me.

However, most agreed that the million dollars did affect their perceptions concerning the realness of *Survivor* .

> CP: I think the least real is like *Survivor*.
>
> KH: Yeah.
>
> PW: Yeah cuz those are the people that go on missions on an island to try and win money.
>
> CP: It's not real to be on an island, eating rats or whatever. . .
>
> KH: People will do things that they normally wouldn't do for a million dollars. Like, I'd eat a rat for a million dollars if I really had to, but they change their life to win money.

In addition to the turf battles over the veracity of *Survivor* and *The Real World*, two other interesting points were made. First, some participants were confused as to whether *Survivor* is a reality show or a game show. Others

asserted that *Survivor* is only a game show. Finally, some participants agreed that *Survivor* is a game show, but maintained that it is different from other game shows, like *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*, and is therefore still a reality show.

> TA: Like as far as *Survivor*, I felt like. . . it's a game. Like how they said Richard was the jerk, he was the smartest one. . .
>
> BC: He was playing the game. That's what *Survivor* was. It wasn't real TV. It was a game show. It was a game show on a deserted island.
>
> BE: *Survivor* is like a game show cuz on game shows they have regular people, not actors, but what's different is that they dragged it out. . .
>
> BR: They taped them and their whole lives 24 hours a day. . .

Turning to *The Real World*, some felt that the situation of seven strangers being put into a contrived living situation mirrored dormitory living, where college students must cope with strangers as roommates and neighbors. However, others felt that what separated dormitory life from *The Real World* is that on the show the producers try to pick people who will clash in order to make "good TV."

> KK: Yeah, but with *Real World* they have an idea of how they want issues to come together. They have a plan. "OK, we want a gay person, we want a race car driver. They have a whole entire plan of what they want to put together. So that, again, diminishes the reality part because they pick certain people. They pick people who have certain problems, who they know are going to clash because that's going to be like stuff they're going to have on TV for people to watch.
>
> KC: But they do the same thing on *Survivor*. They pick like a working woman, an old guy, wasn't one of the guys gay and one of the guys a military man. . .
>
> DB: That's exactly, they pick. . .

> KC: But if they pick everybody the same, then everybody's going to get along. There'd be no drama. That would take all the fun out of it.
>
> KK: That's true, but it's still real. Real people interacting to each other.
>
> KC: Yeah. . .
>
> KK: Cuz you're always going to be faced with people who's attitudes are diverse and different than yours. Either way, that's what everybody, I don't know. I debating about what I say earlier. It's real because it's on TV.
>
> KC: It's just like saying "OK, let's get 10 girls who are really good friends and put them in a house and see what happens." Are we going to watch Katie and Kelly's adventures to the mall? No. You wanna see Katie and Kelly start going at it.

Again, it seems the viewers from the focus groups are cognizant of the alterations to reality that take place with reality television programs; however, they understand that they are done to enhance the viewing experience. If fact, many of the viewers commented on the exact procedures used in making a reality television show, which are covered below.

Real reality TV & *The Truman Show*

All of the focus groups hypothesized about how a real reality show could be created. Many of them discussed the film *The Truman Show* as an example of true reality television, but concluded that this crossed an ethical boundary they were not willing to transverse for the sake of television entertainment.

> BE: I don't think anything is 100% reality TV, unless it's hidden cameras or something.
>
> KR: That would be the only way you could get a real TV, if they didn't know they were being filmed. If you had hidden cameras that would be the only way to get a true reality show.

RG: Do you think there're truly acting themselves?

BC: I don't think you can when there's videos on you all the time. I think if it was something like *The Truman Show* where it's 24 hours a day, your true personality's gonna come out. And I think if there was something like that, that might be real television.

JP: See my problem with *The Real World* and shows like that is basically just a live TV show because, the only difference between that and *The Real World* is there's no script so, if you have actors that do live performances on TV like we all remember some kind of series like a live series, and it's more like, it's considered reality TV because its showing the real things in life like a girlfriend and a boyfriend arguing about something. I guess if that's how you want to define reality TV as being, watching people as they interact or something like that, but reality to me is just a big contradiction. I do know reality TV to me is just a big contradiction. The only reality TV I've ever seen was fake and that was *The Truman Show* because he didn't know he was being filmed and to me that's like, the only way you can get reality TV because nobody acts the same when they're on camera. I don't care if you're on a deserted island. You're going to act differently because you have a camera in your face.

PW: In order for it to be real reality TV you'd have to almost not know that you were being taped. I mean you're gonna change your behavior pattern, you're gonna be more self-conscious of yourself if you know there's a camera following you everywhere.

Participants acknowledge that current reality television is not "real reality" television; however, they admit that 100% real reality television is unethical, illegal and would probably be "boring."

MW: Real reality TV would be extremely boring.

> BE: If you just have a real show of normal life nobody would watch it because it would be boring. So in a way it's not as real because most peoples' lives are not that exciting.
>
> MW: I think that reality TV would only be possible if it were 24/7 and that would be like the most boring thing ever because you don't want to watch someone go to the bathroom.
>
> PW: I think total and complete reality is illegal because it's called taping without someone's consent.
>
> CP: I think if it's a voyeurism thing. Like, I don't agree with it, I'm totally against it, but if you're talking accurate out of like all of them, all the situations, that'll probably be the most because it 24 hours a day, not edited, but I guess, if you want to get completely accurate, that's what it is. You'd be like a peeping Tom. So maybe edited real life TV is better.

One participant made an ethical evaluation about a particular reality television show, *Big Brother*, which comes closest to the real reality programming the viewers hypothesized about. In this show, people are confined to a house, equipped with nearly 40 cameras and over 60 microphones, recording their every move, even on the toilet and in the shower. Footage is available for viewing 24 hours a day via the Internet and also on a primetime nightly telecast. The participant discusses *Big Brother*'s name and its connection with the book *1984*.

> BC: I think it's weird how they picked that name too because if you ever read *1984* Big Brother's not a positive influence. It was suppose to be like the government watching the people and like this bad thing and that's so messed up. Look at what the world is coming to. It's gonna be this awful place where everyone can look in on your life. That's what *1984* was about. And now, that's what we're doing, that's a source of our entertainment? That's sick!

Characteristics of reality television

Participants also discussed the basic characteristics they thought reality television shows possess. The characteristics most frequently mentioned were that reality programs are unscripted and use real people, not actors.

> KR: Unscripted and you don't have actors in it. And it portrays life in some sense, but there's little extras in it to make it a little more interesting.
>
> JI: I feel that what defines reality TV is the script, there's not a script as oppose to shows like *Friends*, *Fraiser* and stuff—they're going by a script. Shows like *Real World* and *Survivor* they don't have one and they're just going by their emotions and their feelings on whatever situations they're in. I think it's neat because society is looking for something that relates to our lives. We that by watching reality TV we can somehow relate to that in some way, whether it's good or bad I'm not sure.
>
> CA: To me, reality TV is like, uh, occurrences that happen in real life. Like accidents or something that would happen to somebody in reality. Not seeing like a witch fly by or something. Or vampires or nothing. It deals with things in real life.
>
> BE: And shows that don't feature professional actors. Just like normal people.
>
> KR: I think it's when you have people and no script and they just sort of go with whatever's happening. They don't know exactly what's going on.

Some participants thought that reality television should be composed of only the exciting parts of peoples' lives. Conversely, other viewers believed that the day-to-day routines of people captured on film was the stuff that reality programming is made of.

> BR: Compiling all the exciting parts of life and then showing you what it is. To catch your attention. No actors, no script too.

CP: It's not any script. Just watching people do their routine.

K K: . . . For me, reality TV is basically like studying that person's life and recording life and seeing what's going on and basically like documentary of seeing what other people in their daily lives and all the interactions that they take day-to-day so you can see I guess how other people live besides yourself.

One participant asserted that as long as the program was not scripted and used non-actors, someone would think of it as reality television.

PW: I think the major things for reality television is basically it has to be non-scripted. It might not be true to life, but in order for it to be considered reality television it has to be non-scripted and not actors just somebody that you never really heard of. Once you complete those qualifications, you can pretty much do whatever you want. Somebody's gonna think it's reality television.

However, using "unscripted" and non-actors as sufficient conditions for a program to be labeled as "reality TV" did not fit most of the participants' view of the genre. Other types of shows, like sports, talk shows and news, which are also unscripted and use non-actors, were differentiated from reality television by the group.

MB: There's a difference between the definition of "reality" and the definition of "reality TV." If something is actual reality, that doesn't mean it's reality TV. Like, sports, it's happening, it's reality, but in a *TV Guide* you wouldn't call it "reality TV." So, things can be actual reality, there's a difference. . . like we keep getting mixed up in our terms. Like, when we say "reality TV" yeah, it's on TV and it's really happening, but that's not "reality TV."

PC: So you're saying reality TV isn't really real.

RG: No. Reality TV is a term that only goes along with certain shows, not to go along with sports. . .

> PC: A catchy term?
>
> MB: Yes! You categorize everything in life.
>
> RG: And a football game is sports, you're always gonna categorize it.
>
> MB: It's just a heading for a different thing.
>
> TA: They call it "reality TV" for lack of a better word. What else are they gonna call it?
>
> ...
>
> MB: If you took the dictionary definition of "reality TV" as stuff that really happens, then a talk show would be reality TV because that's really happening, but talk shows aren't reality TV, they're talk shows.

One participant described how reality television is different from news and sports in more descriptive terms. MW explained that, unlike news and sports, reality television's focus is getting to know the characters. Thus, the plot (known as the facts or circumstance in news and the score in sports) is secondary to the characters in reality programming.

> MW: But isn't it like the point of it, to get to know people on reality TV? To get to know people on *Real World*, to get to know people on *Survivor*? Like I think reality is like life and so in the news you're going to see life going on in the background. That's reality obviously. But, reality TV I think is more like trying to portray life while video taping it. Like, it's a portrayal of it. I don't know. . . Obviously, news is going to be like real life. But I think that sports and news is totally different than reality shows because reality shows is more like getting to know people and creating it more.

However, these viewers did recognized that some thought goes into the plot, setting, shooting style and other dramatic elements of reality programs. The

focus group viewers understood that reality programming must be entertaining enough for people to watch it.

> BC: Reality TV, I think what makes it real is that it's unscripted and that no one's saying "Cut" and "Roll" and, but I do think that it kind of gets bent out of reality when the editors come in and, you kind of have to say real TV would have to be 24 hour exposure with no knowledge of the cameras to really see how the person is. Then you come into the ethical involvement and in this day and age there's just no way you could do that. So, things are as real as they can be for TV for entertainment purposes.

Production techniques & marketing of reality television programs

As mentioned above, viewers were aware that in order for a program to be on television it had to undergo various production procedures. Furthermore, participants discussed, quite sophisticatedly, the production techniques and marketing strategies used in creating a reality television program. One participant shared her thoughts on the making of a reality show.

> KK: Also, with TV, if you're gonna broadcast something, you've got to appeal to your market. You've got a target market and I mean, obviously I think there's a lot of editing that goes on in a lot of these situations, I mean I haven't seen *Big Brother*, but I remember on *Real World* they video taped them throwing a ball for just a long time and that was just the most boring thing to watch. They have to get something that's like, I guess, like what I'm saying, you want something that's going to appeal to your market and get good ratings and good credits and press releases and all that stuff. Like you need, that's the point of being on TV. You're not going to get good viewer ratings if it's not something that's appealing to people. So that's why I think a lot of stuff is edited, to get it on TV you have to edit it because people aren't gonna watch it. So they put in all the exciting and take out all the boring stuff just to keep you there, keep you watching instead of channel surfing. And I feel that the more you cut out, the less real that it is, but it's still real because they put the main points are there, but it's taking out the reality, but I think the only time you're going to find a real tape sitting there, not actually being put on the market. Like to do a 30 second commercial you have like 12 hours of footage. You edit it to get all

> the good parts. That's how, that's how, I mean I'm not in that field, but I think that's how it's usually done.

The excerpt above demonstrates that some of the viewers from the focus groups understand a great deal about the production and marketing process behind the shows they watch. KK mentions target markets, editing, appealing to markets, credits, press releases and ratings. Other participants also indicated a high level of comprehension about the production and marketing of reality television shows. In addition, participants were able to discern different production techniques and values of reality and non-reality programs.

> PW: On a fictional show you start with a script because that's what you have to sell. With a reality program you start with an idea and half of that is auditioning people to see who'll fit in that idea. Instead of coming up with like a script it's more like a storyboard. We're gonna have this number of people and we're gonna put them here and they're gonna do this and we're gonna see what happens. As oppose to selling the words that they are gonna say you're selling the idea of what you wanna do to these people.

The most frequently mentioned production technique was editing. Participants considered editing to be a necessary step for any reality program, even though it took away from its authenticity.

> KK: Like, if you were going to produce a show and make it as real as you could make it, what would you do?
>
> AZ: What would I do?
>
> KK: Let's say that it's your job to make it as real as you thought it was and you had to make it and you had to make it appeal to everyone.
>
> JP: Well, that's where the marketing of the show's gonna have to come in and the producer's affect on the show…
>
> KK: So what would you do? Tell me.

JP: Well, you're going to have to make situations that leave cliffhangers, that you can show two minutes of commercials and have people stay tuned. Obviously, so that they watch the show and you can get your ratings.

KK: So how do you think you can still make that real though? Because to have those cliffhangers, that means that you're going to have to edit a lot right?

JP: Exactly. . .

KC: I mean, producers are going to show you want they know people are going to watch. To get better ratings and stuff.

BE: Choosing the people they want. They want someone like this, someone like this…

BR: They choose what scenes to cut

BE: Choosing the setting.

KR: Choosing the job or activity. They don't want to be happy all the time. They want them to fight and show some sort of, they don't always want them to get along and so I think they put them in some sort of situation to where they're not going to, there's going to be some conflict going on between the characters.

Viewers also noticed differences in technical quality between reality and non-reality shows.

CL: I think the filming's different. Like you can tell the difference when you see it. Like, *Real World*, it just looks more real. The coloring of the whole screen and everything when you're looking at it and then you watch a movie like on Lifetime or something, it's different.

JI: The camera moves real jerky.

One show, *Jackass*, elicited the idea that a show can be subdivided into reality and non-reality television elements. *Jackass* is like a modern day *Candid*

Camera, only the pranks are demented and perverse. For example, one trick involved fooling bystanders on a street corner that they had witnessed a terrible bicycle accident involving an infant (the infant was really just a plastic doll, but the crowd did not know this). Viewers get a kick out of watching the real life reactions of people who do not know that they are witnessing a prank nor that they are being video taped. Participants believed that the reactions of these unsuspecting people made it a reality program; however, the people orchestrating the prank crosses it into non-reality territory.

> PW: I think it's reality TV for the other people, you know the people who aren't in on the gag. I mean, you get to see the reactions of them and that's more reality than anything else.
>
> KH: I think that it's just the peoples' reactions they're just so true.
>
> PW: The people in on the gag, that's not reality. They've got it scripted for themselves, but the reactions are the real part of it where everyone's like "Oh, my God!"
>
> CP: It's kinda like that show *Candid Camera* from a long time ago.
>
> KH: Yeah.

Thus, these viewers were able to differentiate within a particular show the real and non-real elements and assess its reality status accordingly.

The ontology of reality television

Some participants believed that one's ontology determined how they would characterize reality television. Many viewers embraced multiple reality construction. No one went so far as to deny the existence of an external reality; however, several participants argued that there will always be multiple

interpretations of reality and that more than one of these interpretations could be valid depending on the context and the cognizer.

> BR: It's creating life. You can't just make something and say it's reality. Who's to say that this happens everyday or that that is a TV show that is reality? Reality is what you make of it.

> JP: I think a lot of this is just. . . there really is no reality if you really want to get into that discussion, but um, if you want to believe...you can make any show that you watch real if you want it to be. If you want to believe that Jerry Seinfeld is actually this person, then maybe he's in some kind of fictional situation, but if he were put in the exact same situation he'd act the exact same way. So, you can make any show any way you want it to be in your mind. So, I guess it comes in to where you define your reality.

In addition, some viewers maintained that if a viewer closely identified with a character, that is, the viewer's personal reality closely mirrored that of the character on a reality television show, then this resonance could affect how that viewer regarded the realness of the show.

> CP: We all seem to have somewhat altered definitions of reality as it is. . .

> PW: Well, you might just see something and totally identify with this one person. You would perceive this person in this one way that no one else would because they don't identify the same way you do. Right, if someone on there is a soccer player and you're a hard core soccer player then you're just "Oh man, he's so cool!" and you'd totally look up to him and someone else who doesn't play sports is "Whatever, he's a dork." So it's totally up to how somebody would identify with the other person.

> JP: I guess it also kinda depends on how you define your own reality and where in your life, like if somebody's video taping you at that exact moment maybe that was when you were really you. And I guess if you experienced a similar situation like I have, to what they were put on camera like *Survivor*, you know, for ten days I went on a hiking trip in New Mexico where I was a thousands miles from the nearest civilization and it was kinda like that and I felt a lot like

> during those ten days that I kind of grew into me and found out who I was and so I kind of associate a lot with those people on *Survivor*. Put into that situation, you really find out who you are. And if you've got a video camera there that's kinda cool because you see the development.

One participant described reality television as a kind of hybrid of different categories. Using music classifications to illustrate her point, the participant explained the difficulty of classifying reality television.

> KK: Cuz, I think also you've music categories, you have like rock and roll, hip hop and stuff. And some types of music are a mixture of a bunch of stuff. And I think reality TV is something that we categorize, the closest definition is like what he's saying. It's just different than what we've seen. It's just realer than the other stuff, just comparing to the stuff before. But then again, is that really real? Yeah, I know I'm just saying, but that's what we call "reality TV" cuz it's different than what we've seen. And that's the only name we can give it.

As such, participants believed that reality television and reality in general can not be classified in black and white terms. Viewers embraced a more gray construction of reality and acknowledged that what constitutes as reality for some will not do for others.

> JP: It's something that they've made up to be real in their minds. Like, they see this thing on TV and they feel that that is reality to those people. . .
>
> KK: Yeah, exactly. Some people think it's reality and some people don't. I think like he [JP] was saying before that it kinda depends on your own definition of reality to themselves.
>
> JP: I mean, you can try and classify it like you can try and classify people as being white or black, but nobody's really black and nobody's really white. I mean, you've got some kind of end to the spectrum somewhere. Like you've got one end of the spectrum being completely fictional cartoon show and you've got the other end that would be, I guess, something like *Real World* or *Survivor* or something where you've got at least real people, they're real.

> But, I guess, people define real TV as realer than what they've seen because basically what's been on TV since the 1950's is like sitcoms, you know, something that's had some storyline, some plot., but now you've got TV shows that are impromptu. People are given, saying "Here's your time in life," you know "We'll pay you a million dollars to do it."

Effects of focus group

The focus group discussion affected several of the participants' views about reality television. Some expressed almost a regret that they now had developed a new critical sense about a genre they had previously taken for granted as real. After participating, some viewers decided that reality television was a misnomer and a few were grasping for words to describe its true meaning.

> JP: Exactly, I really don't believe in real TV anyway.
>
> KC: Any more [laughs].
>
> AZ: I thought I did. . .
>
> JP: No, I came in here and I knew that I didn't believe in reality TV.
>
> KC: Uh, well. . . I thought it could be real, but. . .
>
> AZ: I thought I could define it.
>
> ---
>
> TA: . . . This whole thing has just made me, like this whole thing has just made me think twice. When I think of "reality TV" I think of shows like *Real World*, *Survivor*, things like that, just because I feel that's the way society has defined the word "reality TV."

In sum, viewers from the five focus groups recognized that reality television is not "really real," but that it was "as close as you can get" to real for a television program. Participants maintained that the only real way to truly capture reality would be to tape 24 hours a day without letting the subjects know they were being taped. However, these viewers acknowledged that *Truman Show-*

type reality programming would cross legal and ethical boundaries they are unwilling to cross for the sake of entertainment. Furthermore, participants maintained that even if such programming existed it would be extremely boring. Focus group participants displayed an impressive breadth of knowledge about the production techniques put into making a reality television program. In the end, many of the viewers analyzed thought that how one characterizes "reality television" depends on one's interpretation of reality itself. Nonetheless, participants did come up with a unified set of characteristics for reality television, namely, programs that are unscripted, with no actors (i.e. the people are playing themselves, not a made-up character), with some guidance by the producers concerning the location, cast and activities (but not enough guidance to change the intrinsic nature of people involved), with real unrehearsed reactions to life (be it day-to-day life or more exciting elements of life).

In-depth Interviews and Document Analysis

The author conducted four in-depth phone interviews, two with reality television producers and two with professionals working within the media industry. The two reality television producers (JM & MEB) work together on several reality television programs. One of the media professionals (MS) works for an internationally known media publication and has visited several reality production sets and analyzed and talked with several reality television producers. The other media professional (MK) works in a governing role for the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, which produces and regulates the Emmys. Documents were collected from a multitude of sources, including

network transcripts, network chat room discussions transcripts, network press releases, biographies, a report and organizational rule book. Information was collected, analyzed and categorized.

The findings from the in-depth interviews and document analysis are divided topically into five sections. The first section covers the development of reality television. Analyzing the historical development of reality television assists in understanding the current trend of the genre (RQ3). The second section examines the popularity of reality television, giving some insight into how reality television has captured huge audiences. The third section looks at how media producers and professionals characterize reality television (RQ8, RQ9). The fourth section analyzes how media producers and professionals distinguish reality television from different forms of non-fiction. Uncovering how media producers and professionals differentiate and analyze reality television aids in the understanding of what is unique to the genre (RQ10). The fifth section explores the production techniques media producers and professionals attribute to reality television programs (RQ6).

Development of reality television

The media producers and professionals interviewed and analyzed agree that reality television programming has been around for a long time, long before the term "reality television" was created.

> MS: I define reality television apparently much broader than most people because I don't think there's been an incredible surge in reality programming. Reality television has always been a staple of TV since the very beginning days of television and it always will be. . . . It's kind of stupid to call the news reality television. But that's exactly what it should be. Naturally, since TV began, the news has

been one of the most important services television provides. It connects us all. It's had a dramatic effect on the world. By connecting us to one another – if the news ain't reality TV, I don't know what is. That certainly is one thing that's been with us since the beginning of television. But we've also had other talk shows like the early Tonight Show with Steve Allen, Dave Garroway in Today and things like that where much more so than today, we would see real people.

MK: If you look at some of the networks, like the various Discovery networks, the Discovery Channel, TLC, Animal Planet etc., and some of the others out there like A&E and the History Channel, and a lot of programming on PBS over the years – they've been doing this stuff for a long, long time, with great success. Now some of your major over-the-air broadcast networks are tending to do more of that. So it's been working for a long time. There's been an audience appetite for it for a long time. It's now getting greater exposure.

MB: You mentioned *Candid Camera* earlier and that's been around for 20 years and *COPS* have been around for a long time. So, reality television has existed for a while. It's only recently that networks and viewers have caught on to it and frankly we can't understand why it took this long. But, given the network's economic model, reality TV needs to be around.

While reality programs have been around for awhile, documents supplied by the National Association of Television Program Executives (NATPE) show a substantial growth in network and overall productions of reality television shows. As the data indicate, there has been a substantial growth in reality television programs, from 14 in the 1960s, to 39 in the 1990s. In addition, from 2000-2001, more than 40 new reality programs have been recorded or researched. Thus, reality programming has grown more in the past two years than in all of the 1990s—and the 1990s showed the largest growth of the decade-long expansion of the genre to date.

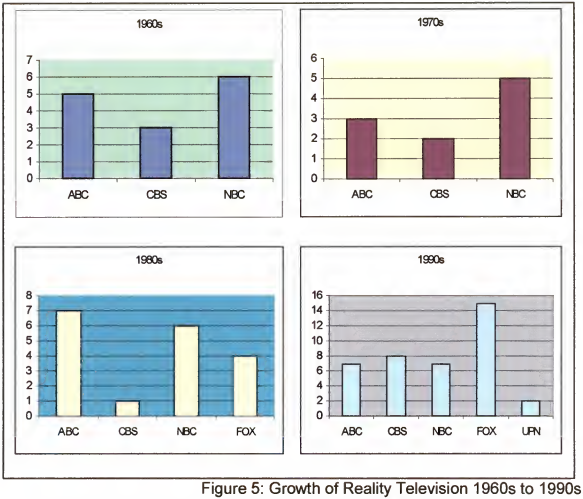

Figure 5: Growth of Reality Television 1960s to 1990s, Source: NATPE document, "TV's Roots of Reality"

Why is reality television so popular?

As the data above indicate, reality television programming has experienced a tremendous growth over the past few years. In addition, it looks like the trend will continue in its upwards course. Media producers and professionals working with reality programming provided some clues as to why reality television programming is popular with viewers and networks.

> MS:. . . I think that part of it, kind of the initial fascination with shows like *Survivor* is that we don't have these whiney-assed actors who get paid a million dollars a week and bitching and moaning the whole time about how small their trailer is. We don't have to deal with these. . . . I think one of the reasons that – when *Survivor*

> came on nobody thought the show was going to do what it did. When it came on, not only did it do well because it was a good idea, but it did well because we were so sick and tired of celebrities. Screw 'em.
>
> ---
>
> MK: I think there are a few reasons for it, among them, some of them are very well made, very well produced, and audiences recognize and appreciate that and are enjoying, not a new form of programming per se, but it has emerged in much greater numbers. Economics is driving a lot of it. Keep in mind, they're less expensive to produce, generally speaking, than most drama, most fictional programs. So the economics of the industry drives a lot of this.
>
> ---
>
> MS: Another reason that people are trying to gravitate – this is the worst thing in the world for professionals in Hollywood. They can't stand reality programming. I think it's hilarious. They're talking about how evil it is and awful it is and they want it to stop, because of course it hurts them in the pocketbook. But the funny thing is, if they'd just stop writing such crap and – I really believe that people are just so sick of all these stupid sitcoms and dramas. We've got five cop shows – five New York City cop shows on TV right now. Enough! They happen to be some of the best shows on television. It doesn't matter. It's enough. So one of the things that is attracting people to reality programming is the fact that it's different and new.

Thus, according to these media professionals, the growth in reality television programming is the result of both creative and economic factors. Reality television, at least the newest breed of it, gives viewers something new to watch. In addition, reality television costs substantially less than its fictional counterpart. MS's comment that reality television hurts media professionals "in the pocketbook" refers to the fact that reality programming does not require any expensive actors or writers, two of the major cost components of traditional fictional programming. Mark Burnett, in an interview with PBS's Charlie Rose, describes how his show *Survivor* has created "a new era" for television.

> MB: Doesn't mean every *Survivor*-like show will make it. It won't. But there's a place now for this kind of drama alongside dramatic shows like *ER* or comedies like *Frasier* or *Friends*, and much like those shows, there's 50 pilots made a year of dramas and then another 50 pilots made of comedies. And maybe one or two shows break out and make it. Well, the same thing will happen with this. There'll be 50 or 100 of these shows made, one or two will be accepted and have some longevity. And I hope *Survivor* is one of those. So there's a new era made. How I think Survivor would change television is the economics. It's much more inexpensive to produce, and the integrated marketing and sponsorship elements make sense in a world where the networks aren't that profitable.

Burnett also revealed his motivations for creating *Survivor* and his vision to bring associative and integrative marketing into the content of television programming.

> MB: I think I have some good vision of what I think people might like, on one level. And the other level is, I looked to television and saw an enormous disconnect between people creating shows and the most important people of all, the advertisers. I mean, let's face it, in commercial television, the networks would prefer to get rid of all programming and run 24-hour-a-day ads. I mean, we're in the business of selling ads, and therefore. . . . But why wouldn't the creative producers speak to the advertisers to try and be-- have a symbiotic relationship, versus selling the network an idea, the network tells the advertising salespeople, who then sell to the advertisers? I felt there was a disconnect. And with Tivo and Replay coming in. . . . fast-forwarding through commercials, I knew associative marketing and integrated marketing was critical to the profitability of success, and I decided to do this with product placement and an integrated sponsorship, not advertising sales, and worked with CBS hand in hand to make that happen.

Survivor uses product placements to integrate sponsorship with programming content. Target, Budweiser, and Reebok are a few of *Survivor*'s major advertising sponsors. Thus, audiences watch the players on *Survivor* use various products from Target, drinking Budweiser and sporting Reebok clothing. Then, when the commercials roll, audiences are hit with advertisements from Target, Budweiser and Reebok, among others.[1]

One media professional had a different take on the success of *Survivor*, claiming that the unique look and format of the show captured a viewing audience that had never seen anything like it before.

> MS: So here comes *Survivor* and it works different, it's on an island, it didn't look like *Gilligan's Island* and there weren't any celebrities. There really wasn't even a host. It was just a bunch of real people and they were doing some funny-assed stuff. They were hungry. They were dirty. They weren't wearing makeup. They didn't have their hair all fixed up like everybody else does on TV. Everything about the look of the show was different, something we weren't used to and people – it was a total water cooler show. People started talking about it. Did you see that show last night? Each week the ratings went higher and higher and higher. It also happened to be just a factor of the nature of the show, which is that as there are fewer and fewer contestants, you get more and more into the people there. You learn about them, and also it gets more and more intense for them and more and more interesting for the viewer. So it was just a natural. It just streamed all the way to the end of the show and then set record ratings.

But is *Survivor* a reality television program? In the next subsection, media producers and professionals characterize reality television.

Characterizing reality television

Some informants had specific ideas as to what reality television programming is; however, others maintained that reality TV is difficult to specifically define because it is a hybrid of different genres.

> MK: Now programming has evolved. Hybrid forms have emerged. The labels and the definitions and the categories that currently exist, there is a stirring and has been a stirring for quite a long time that it needs to be modified. There needs to be substantial new categories to provide opportunities for newer types and forms of programming to have their own areas in which to be recognized for excellence, to compete against one another, the creation of categories to inspire producers and creators to make the best in their specific areas, and to avoid a situation in which apples are

competing against oranges. Let's have apples versus apples, separately oranges versus oranges.

MS: What we have seen is a bunch of shows that use real people and put them in unreal situations, whether its *Boot Camp* or *Temptation Island* or *Survivor* or any number of a slew of programs coming up like *Fear Factor*, *Spy TV*, *Love Cruise*, *The Amazing Race* - tons of them are coming. There's one thing that connects them all and that's is they find real people, that is, people who aren't professional actors, and put them in front of the cameras and watch them do stuff that they wouldn't ordinarily be doing in their lives, like lying in a pit of snakes or rats or going to an island or the outback without all the toys that people normally have, and dealing with not having food or 7-11's down the block. These are all very unreal situations.

MEB: This has been a big controversy over the last six months with the Television Academy in terms of how do you add a new category. *The Real World* might be defined one way while *Survivor* is defined another way. What the TV Academy has derived at is that reality television takes the lives of real people in real situations with a purpose to entertain. Now that's to distinguish it from the category of informational programming, which is largely, you know, informational documentaries, which are to educate or inform. Reality television depicts the lives of real people in real events.

JM: Reality television uses a documentary form, but in a commercial, network structure.

MEB: They've recently distinguished between programs being a reality type and programs being a reality game show. Reality game shows have a game structure and offer a prize. So for example, *Road Rules*, under the TV Academy guidelines is considered a reality game show, whereas *The Real World* is a reality type program.

The National Academy of Television Arts & Science (NATAS) has created definitions of programming to cover "reality type" shows and "reality game" shows. According to the NATAS, reality programming "depicts people and/or events in dramatic circumstances with the primary intent to entertain (excluding

all programs with game show, prize and/or contest elements)." Shows that contain a game element, like *Survivor*, fit into a second new category created by the NATAS, the special class category. The NATAS characterizes special class programming as "programming that does not have eligibility in either the non-fiction special (informational) or series (informational) areas, or the above newly-created area."[2] Thus, the NATAS created a catch-all category for shows like *Survivor*, which resist simple classification because, as creator Mark Burnett asserts, *Survivor* is a game show, an adventure contest and a drama wrapped into one.[3] Below, we see discourse between Rose and Burnett about some of the criticism Burnett faced concerning *Survivor*.

> CR: Is there something about this that you think most of us don't get?. . . . Anything else that we don't get that makes this such a phenomenal success? Because it is unlike anything that we have seen before on television, much more than *Millionaire* is unlike, because *Millionaire's* very much like things we've seen before.
>
> MB: You know, this is-- the ability to laugh at yourself-- clearly, it's very tongue-in-cheek. I mean, the amount of experienced producers, far more experienced than I will ever be, probably, who told me, Mark, you better decide, we have a game show or an adventure contest or a drama? You can't have a hybrid of all three.
>
> CR: Yes.
>
> MB: And additionally, Mark, don't use that music. It's like a feature film score. You'll be laughed at. You need contemporary [unintelligible] for a reality show. And whatever you do, don't have those flames with ``The Tribe has spoken." You'll be laughed at.

Here it appears Burnett thinks of his show as a hybrid and that was initially rejected by other media professionals who insisted on labeling it a reality program. However, Burnett seems to waver back and forth, sometimes referring

to his work as reality programming and sometimes flat out denying his shows are reality programs. For example, at the beginning of the Charlie Rose interview Burnett avers:

> MB:. . . I think the important thing, what makes Survivor work, is its simple story-telling. It's a drama, it's not a reality show.

However, later on during the interview Burnett describes another show he is working on, *Combat Mission*, which he labels as a reality show:

> MB: It's another show which is a reality show, taking teams of special forces operatives, making them live on a Dirty Dozen-type base and do missions against each other, simulating combat.

Notice that Burnett calls *Combat Mission* "another " show of his that is a "reality show." Furthermore, it seems the format of *Combat Mission* and *Survivor* are virtually the same. Both have teams or tribes competing against each other under severe conditions by completing missions or challenges. Why does Burnett consider *Combat Mission* a reality television show, but not *Survivor*?[4]

There is more evidence to show that Burnett is confused or purposely evasive about how he classifies his work. In response to a recent lawsuit from a former *Survivor* participant, Stacy Stillman, Burnett argued that "the show is not a game at all, merely a reality-based drama with admittedly high stakes" (Levine 2001, p. 3). However, transcripts from an online chat conducted with Burnett have him whistling a different tune:

> MB: The entire situation in which 16 castaways found themselves is pretty contrived. They would never have even been on the island if we hadn't contrived the setting. That is why I reject the labels of reality television for *Survivor* or anything like it. It is simply a drama with non-actors in an unscripted contrived setting. The outcomes are real—the setting is not. ("Survivor Mark Burnett," 2001, p.5)

Despite Burnett's indecision, one media professional had no trouble pegging *Survivor*.

> MK: . . . In fact, we're coming up with these categories and somebody said to me, 'What's the difference between *Temptation Island* and *Survivor*?' I said *Survivor*'s a game show. That's why it goes into the special class category. *Survivor* has competition. It has a prize. *Temptation Island* does not. *Temptation Island* is a staged social experiment, but there's no competition, no contestants, no prize.

Documentary vs. reality TV vs. reality doc

Several informants differentiated reality programming from documentary and reality doc programming. The two producers interviewed characterized their programming as a "documentary soap opera."

> JM: We expect the public to be cynical about reality television. It's new programming and it's still grasping for terms. The print press lumps everything together as "reality TV," but it's not all the same.
>
> MEB: Well, you could say that it's not real unless you have hidden cameras and show the unedited footage 24 hours a day, but that's not going to make for very interesting television. You're still following a dramatic arch. . . . It's still reality, the footage is still captured in the documentary form. *The Real World* is a documentary soap opera. So, getting back to a question you asked earlier, whether there were degrees of reality programming, there maybe shows that are more real, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they're better.

Thus, these producers consider their work to fit under the canopy of reality television, borrowing production techniques from both documentary and traditional dramatic programming. Like documentary, the two producers believe their programming tells "a bigger truth." Unlike documentary, they contend that

the primary purpose of reality programming is to entertain, while documentary informs and enlightens.

> MEB: Reality television is produced in a commercial format using the documentary method whose principle goal is to entertain. On the other hand, the Discovery Channel has lots of programming that's done in the documentary format, but it's main purpose is to inform and educate.
>
> JM: But, the Discovery Channel is also needs to be entertaining. They're looking at their ratings too.

Another informant describes reality docs and distinguishes them from documentaries and reality television programming.

> MS: There are shows where you can watch a couple through the process of dating and moving to marriage and getting married and having a baby, and those are separate shows. These are real people and they are much closer – they're not quite a documentary but they're close. That's reality TV but that's not what people mean when they talk about reality TV. . . . I think when people talk about reality – when we talk about reality TV – we're not talking about a doctor – we're not talking about documentaries, even though in 1970, I believe, the very first reality TV, even though the phrase didn't exist, was *An American Family*. That was the first time that people, real people – I mean TV was something – the first time that real people had cameras in their homes and in effect forgot that the cameras were there and we supposedly saw what a real American family was like. We're not seeing anything about what – on The Learning Channel or Discovery or any number of these networks that have these programs – that's closer to just showing – that's closer to documentaries, except it's shot in a different way and basically we're just seeing someone work. We hear a little bit about what maybe – if it's a vet what the animals are going through, who the animals' owners are. It's *(inaudible)* but it's not a documentary where you actually really learn something meaningful and there's some depth to it. This is kind of surface stuff where you see a doctor save an animal and you go wow that's neat, but you don't learn much about anything except that people look like their dogs. The difference – you could say that all of this stuff does fit under the umbrella of reality TV. But that's not what, when people talk about reality TV, we're not talking about the vet on Channel 9. We're talking about this kind of relatively new genre where producers take real people and do unreal things with them, in the name of ratings.

> That's kind of what people mean when they're talking about reality TV. They're not talking about the news and they're not talking about the vet on Channel 99.

Thus, according to MS, documentaries are much deeper and more informative than reality docs. Sliding down the scale are what the popular culture, according to the informant, thinks of as reality television, like *The Real World*. Reality television shows are commercially driven, while documentaries are more socially driven. Reality television is produced as an entertainment want; documentary is produced as a social-good need, and reality docs fit somewhere in between.

Production of reality television programs

Producers and media professionals interviewed and analyzed provided information about the production techniques used to make reality television programs. Data collected from the document analysis also provided information on how producers make reality television programs. The most frequently mentioned technique was editing, followed by casting and producer influence.

> JM: We're editing a story to get to, to tell a bigger truth. We'll never edit something that tells a false story. The stories are real, it's what really happened. Nothing staged or made up, but we do make editorial choices in order to get to the bigger truth about what's going on.

> MS: You know what, if it's on TV and if it's a TV show, it's not reality. I went to *Survivor*. I went to Borneo and camped out on the island and watched them shoot the show. I went to Belize and watched them shoot *Temptation Island*, and all you're seeing is what the producers package into the show for you to see. So there are certain things – and all the contestants – it's hilarious – every one of them, whether it's *Survivor* or *Temptation Island* or whatever, they think that through the editing they're made to look stupid or obnoxious or mean. They don't realize that this is editing. This is a process of editing. You get rid of the junk and you keep the conflict, the interesting things, the stuff that will make people go

> wow, and you put that in the show. This is a TV show, it's not reality. Do I think that some reality shows are more real? No, they're all the same. They're just real people doing unreal things. There's nothing real about any of them.

The two excerpts above show a major difference between the views of one producer of reality television shows and a media industry professional who has witnessed the production process firsthand . Editing is a necessary element of television. However, the producer believes that the editing process can help bring out the truth of the experiences and people being taped. Conversely, MS contends that reality television is edited like any other television program and has weak connections to the reality it captured. Following MS's comment above, he was then asked why we call these programs "reality television" if, in his opinion, they are not accurate representations of reality.

> MS: Because you have to call it something. The thing that – it's kind of the big lie, because there's nothing real about reality TV shows, except for one thing, and this is why they call it that. They're real people. . . . Just real people reacting to real people in an unreal situation. The TV part of it is that it's a setup, it's a game. There's a hook. There's something that they're throwing at these people to get a reaction. If you just turn cameras on real people what you would get would be a great way to go to sleep every night. If you just had cameras on the people on *Survivor* Island or in the outback, you would just – it would be the biggest bore on television, because ninety percent of what they do is nothing. They sit and wait and there's nothing exciting. There's nothing exciting about seeing them walk an hour and a half to a tribal council, so you don't see it. There's nothing exciting about seeing them twice a day walk an hour for water, so you don't see it. What you do see is the interactions, the conflicts, the flare ups. . . . So they've got to come up with a term for what they're doing here, and what they're doing is taking real people and putting them in unreal situations which are controlled by the producers. This is a TV show, it is for entertainment. They need something to happen, so they call it reality TV. The could just as easily have called in unreality TV or not-reality TV, but again they've got to come up with something and

> it's just because there are real people. It's like almost a no-brainer to call it reality TV.

Reality television, according to the source above, uses editing, not to get at some deeper truth, but to make the show more entertaining and marketable to audiences. Hence, producers and professionals working with reality programming see editing as a needed element; however, they differ substantially in whether or not this affects the end product.

Another production element mentioned by both media producers and professionals was the use of casting. Reality television uses real people, that is, individuals who are not professional actors playing a part, but rather people who are just being themselves. However, the assortment of participants for a reality television program is highly selective. Producers admit that they favor individuals who will enhance the drama of the show.

> MEB: Well, *The Real World* casts real people and the events are not staged. There is a theatricality that is explained to the cast before the show even begins. They understand that they are being brought together because they have differences and that this will create drama. But after that, the producers don't interfere with the development of the cast or the events.
>
> JM: And the cast does interact with the production staff during interviews, but there are very specific and strict guidelines about how those interviews are conducted. We interview, but don't interfere. And we'll never reveal what one cast member says about another to that person. So, for example, if one cast member says Jill is an ass and a slut we won't pull Jill into the confession room and say such-and-such called you an ass and a slut. We want to capture the natural evolution of the characters as it happens.

According to the producers above, the assembled cast is like fresh kindling, but they let the characters themselves start the fire. Thus, some reality television producers believe that influencing the people on their shows is an unacceptable

practice because it crosses ethical and professional boundaries. However, Burnett feels differently.

The producer of *Survivor*, Mark Burnett, had some interesting comments about influencing the conduct of players on his show. Burnett contends that he does not try to influence the characters on his show, but freely admits that he would do so if he thought it would make better television.

> CR: How much do you influence it? What impact do you have? In other words, some might say, Boy, they-- the [unintelligible] seems too good, the dynamics of the human relationships. Is there any way that anybody from your staff who worked for you encourage on-- encourage people's conduct during the shooting of this?
>
> MB: No--
>
> CR: You're too much of this, you're too little of this, we'd like to see more of this, we'd like to see more of that, be yourself--
>
> MB: No--
>
> CR: --but be more of yourself--
>
> MB: --not at all, because-- if I thought it would work, I'm not above that. But I--
>
> CR: But if you thought it would work you would do it, or wouldn't do it?
>
> MB: Sure, I would do it. I'm making a TV show.

In recent weeks, Burnett's attitude and zeal for making good television has raised a onslaught of criticism (DeMarco, 2001; "*Survivor II*," 2001; Buncombe, 2001; Huff, 2001). On May 7, 2000, Burnett appeared as a guest speaker at the Museum of Television and Radio for a seminar on reality television. There he admitted to using body doubles and reshooting scenes for *Survivor II*. One media professional, who has visited the *Survivor* set, commented on Burnett's actions.

> MS: . . . That's why Burnett got in trouble on the second show because he never would have done that shot on the first show, never, but the pressure was on him to make it look better and he did. They do – the thing you can't do is retake stuff, re-shoot a challenge, and he didn't do any of that, which is good. But to fake something with doubles of the contestants just takes a little bit away from the credibility of the show. Now you don't know what else is faked here. So that was a really stupid thing for him to do. It doesn't harm the show in any way but it's just dumb.

Burnett's response to his critics: "I absolutely couldn't care less—I'm making great television" (Buncombe 2001, p. 15). Making great television, at all expenses, could have some unfortunate consequences for reality television. One media professional predicts that by the time network executives get done with reality television it will resemble any other fictional program. Thus, according to MS, part of the blame for the *Survivor*-body-double-debacle, should be placed squarely on the network's shoulders, who just cannot seem to leave reality alone.

> MS: . . . What he [Burnett] should have done – but there was a lot of pressure on him from the first show to the second show. They really put – they got more cameras and this is something CBS wanted to do – they got tons of more cameras involved. They really wanted to jack it up a little bit and make it even better. They got a lot more attractive people in the cast. You saw immediately that even with the success of *Survivor*, the TV people want to make it more and more and more fake, which is not have real people, not have a truck driver, a female truck driver, not have a crotchety old ex-Navy Seal and then have more younger, hotter people. That's not real. So it's just impossible for these TV people to leave well enough alone. They can't leave reality alone. They can't. Reality is not good enough. It doesn't look good, know what I mean? They've got to have somebody in the back doing hair and makeup and making sure that the backdrop is pretty and have the right lighting. They don't know real.

In sum, these producers and professionals working in reality television programming agree that the genre is not necessarily new, but has grasped a new name and has attained incredible surge in popularity during recent years. In

addition, some characterize reality programming as a type of hybrid, others align it more closely with documentary and still others deny that it is real at all. Hence, there seems to be very little consensus within the media industry as to what reality television is. However, all of the informants interviewed and all of the documents analyzed maintained that some of the key elements of reality programming are that it uses real people (non-actors) in some situation (contrived or otherwise) and records the unscripted, unrehearsed reactions of those people to the situation. Finally, both producers and professionals acknowledged that several production techniques, including editing and casting, are used in the making of reality television programs. However, none of the participants interviewed, nor any of the documents reviewed suggested that characters on reality shows were somehow influenced or manipulated to perform or act in a certain way.

Notes

[1] There is a new show coming out called *The Runner* where a person races from one part of the country to another searching for a product and the goal is to get to all of these products first. Here, we see the ultimate in product placements, where the products themselves become the object of desire, the pot of gold the contestants are searching for.

[2] Quotes are excerpts from the NATAS rule book used to guide the Emmy awards. This document was provided to the author by a representative of the NATAS.

[3] The informant from the NATAS goes on to clarify the distinctions between the four non-fiction programming categories:

> MK: I just want to make sure that you're clear on these new categories. For example, in the first category, Outstanding Non-Fiction Special, Informational Special, you're going to find your

> traditional long-form documentary. In the Outstanding Non-Fiction Informational Series, same thing, the only difference is those are series and the other ones are the run-offs. In the Outstanding Non-Fiction Reality Program category you are going to get both specials and series, but those are the ones, again, with that definition – dramatic circumstances, intent to entertain etc. We realize there are gray areas. . . . Now maybe someday the Academy will, instead of having a thing called special class, maybe they will have something called night-time game show. But they've got to work that out with the other Academy, which technically governs all the game shows regardless of the time they're televised on the air.

[4] Also, it is puzzling why Burnett would agree to be one of two keynote speakers at a seminar on reality television and why CBS's online press release page would label *Survivor* a reality television program if he did not believe *Survivor* was a reality television program.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

> The thing that you do have to watch out for with reality TV is that, again, the producers aren't happy with reality. Sometimes reality is really boring, and sometimes it's not pretty, and sometimes it makes for really lousy television, and it takes a long time, because there's no script. To get what you want may take forever and you never know what you're going to get.
>
> In-depth Interview Participant (MS)

Importance of Issue

Reality television has recently experienced a surge in programming that has only been outmatched by its viewer ratings. Audiences flock to reality shows because they offer something different than the standard television fare of sitcoms and dramas. Networks are eating up reality programming because it costs substantially less than fictional shows and is still able to capture viewers. As a result, reality television programming has made an indelible mark on popular culture, moving from a passing fancy to a new twist on a non-fiction form.

In addition to its growth in programming and viewership, audiences view reality television differently than other programs. From the viewers' perspective, reality television characters are not characters at all, but real people playing themselves. Hence, viewers, after watching a character week after week, come to believe that they know the people on a reality television show. For example, viewers felt justified in believing that Susan, from the first *Survivor*, was an immoral individual simply by watching her behavior, or at least the behavior

viewers were allowed to see after the editing process, on the show. Viewers of reality programs extend their ethical evaluations of reality participants outside the parameters of the show. Similar incidents occur with actors, where soap stars who play villains receive hate mail. Unlike the parasocial effects well documented with soap opera actors, where fanatic viewers confuse the actor for the made-up character role they portray, the people on reality programs are not playing a role, they are playing themselves. Thus, the ethical evaluations made by viewers cannot be passed off as a strange misconnection viewers have between reality and fantasy.

Reality programs show real people and their real reactions to situations. As a result, audiences believe they are witnessing something real, not scripted or rehearsed. The two conditions above allow audiences to feel justified in placing higher epistemic weight in the their knowledge claims about the people in reality television programs than in their fictional counterparts. For example, a viewer of *Seinfeld* could claim that he really knows Jerry Seinfeld because he has faithfully watched *Seinfeld* and examined his behavior. However, Jerry Seinfeld, even while playing a fictional role of himself, is still playing a character, a scripted role and therefore, his knowledge claim would be given very little weight. On the other hand, a viewer of *The Real World*, who has watched and studied Melissa, a participant on *Real World New Orleans*, and claims to know Melissa would be granted higher epistemic consideration simply because that viewer's knowledge claim is grounded in a real person, not a fictional character. Hence, reality

television has special epistemological strings attached to it that make it a unique and intriguing research endeavor.

Finally, there is very little academic research examining reality programming in general. Moreover, there are no other studies examining how academics, viewers and media producers and professionals critically analyze and understand reality television programming. As such, the current analysis provides new insight in reality television research. It is important to grasp how reality television programming is interpreted and characterized at this beginning stage because for research in reality programming to prosper, academics must begin by demonstrating a clear understanding of the phenomena they are studying. Knowing how academics, viewers and media producers think about reality television's development, growth, production techniques, veracity, characteristics and ontology provides a knowledge set that will aid future analyses in this area. Furthermore, media professionals and producers should find the results of the current study useful because it gives them an opportunity to examine and understand viewers' beliefs and feelings about reality programming. Given the popularity and growth of reality television, combined with the dynamic and unwieldy nature of the programming, the present study creates useful and exciting knowledge that will serve as a practical guide for future reality programming research and provide viewer data for the reality programming industry.

Discussion of Findings

One of the things that makes reality television so interesting to study is that it seems to have taken television by storm; yet popular culture is still seeking to fully understand this unwieldy, weed-like phenomenon. So much of what makes it onto the airwaves seems to be labeled "reality television" that it is difficult to know just what makes a program a reality program. The present study has attempted to clear some of the confusion by uncovering the development, growth, popularity, production techniques, ontology and common characteristics that academics, viewers, media producers and professionals associate with reality programming.

In general, the academics, viewers, media producers and professionals studied agree that reality program contains the following characteristics: no script, real people, and real, unrehearsed reactions to some event or situation. All three groups acknowledged that production techniques are used to enhance the viewing experience. None of the participants interviewed, nor any of the documents reviewed accused or admitted to influencing or manipulating the characters of reality television programs.

However, it is the points of contention—the areas of disagreement, where individuals viewing the same material come to clashing conclusions—that are perhaps the most fascinating to examine. For example, the viewers and media professionals and producers analyzed differed on how the settings affected the "realness" of reality television shows. Some viewers strongly maintained that extreme, highly contrived settings, like those on *Survivor*, brought out the true

nature of the characters. That is, some believed that the pressures put on participants in these reality programs somehow helped to extract the pure essence of the individuals. Conversely, others emphatically maintained that the unreal settings only brought the end result farther away from its reality roots. They argued that by making the show about challenges, money and alliances you missed out on what is most important to reality programming—the real people.

The viewers from the focus groups seemed quite knowledgeable of the production techniques used to develop a reality television program. Some were even able to describe how producing a reality show differs from a fictional show. For example, one participant understood that producers must sell an idea, not a script for a reality television program. Furthermore, viewers reasoned that once producers have sold the idea for a show, they must then find real people who fit the concept of that show. In addition, viewers were aware that producers try to assemble 'casts' that are dynamic and combative in nature. Thus, even though reality television lacks a script and also a guarantee of excitement, producers increase their chances of dramatic situations simply by putting the right people together. Again, some viewers believed that this element appropriately mirrored reality because people are invariably put in situations (e.g. work, living, community) where they are forced to interact with others that differ (personality wise, ideologically or other) from themselves. However, others claimed that the casting of different people was too contrived and predictable. They wondered

how real is it to *always* have one older person, one young partygoer, one highly religious person and one gay person winding up in the same environment.

Another interesting finding was how these viewers seemed to confuse what was more real with what was more interesting for them to watch. When asked to differentiate between reality programs that were more to less real, viewers would invariably place shows that were more interesting to them personally high on the scale of realness and those that they found uninteresting lower on the scale realness. When pressed by other participants as to their rationalization for placing, for example, *The Real World* higher than *Survivor* on the reality television scale, they would first give a reason (e.g. that the setting is unreal), which would be quickly retorted by fans of the opposing show. However, often times the participant would eventually use personal viewing preference as a guide for determining where a show fit on the realness scale. The focus group data suggests that viewers might confuse what is real with what is more entertaining to watch—a dangerous confusion indeed, especially given the concerns of some media professionals who assert that networks cannot leave reality alone. The genre of reality television faces the risk of being overly produced, for the sake of entertainment, until it no longer resembles the reality some producers and viewers maintain it purportedly reveals.

All of the academics, viewers, media producers and professionals examined acknowledge that reality programming must employ some production elements in order for it to be on television. As such, editing, casting and setting become necessary elements for any reality program. Furthermore, as noted

above, focus group participants were quite capable of identifying and discussing the production techniques utilized in reality television programs. However, do viewers ever think about those production techniques while watching the programs at home? That is, are viewers cognizant of the editing, sound and image sweetening, casting, setting manipulation, etc. while watching reality programs from the comforts of their own living rooms? Academic and producer data suggest that the production techniques employed are often seamless, resisting easy detection. Hence, it is questionable whether viewers recognized the myriad of production elements embedded into reality programming.

Despite worries about reality television programming becoming overly produced or that the production elements themselves are often undetectable, the media producers and professionals interviewed as well as the focus group viewers agreed that in order for a show to make it on television it had to have a certain amount of production values. For example, both groups of participants acknowledged that while editing might distort the actuality it captures, if reality programs were not edited they would be so boring that they would be unwatchable, which translates into unmarketable, unairable programming. Furthermore, several viewers mentioned that even if you could air all of the unedited footage, perhaps over the Internet, the presence of the camera or the person's knowledge that he or she was being recorded affected the "reality" displayed. Several participants suggested that the closest thing to "real" reality television would be a show like *The Truman Show* where the person is unknowingly recorded every minute of the day; however, this crossed ethical and

legal boundaries no one was willing to traverse for the sake of true reality television programming.

Reality television, according to the participants and documents analyzed, is not about portraying reality to its fullest. Rather reality television is an ontological compromise between truth and entertainment, willingly and openly trimming away realness for the sake of making and watching good television. Thus, is reality television really real? No. Does it matter? Not really or, at least, not yet. For now, these academics, viewers, media producers and professionals accept the current state of reality television programming as something that is "as real as you can get on TV."

Implications

The current analysis used symbolic interactionism to understand how different groups of people, academics, viewers and media producers and professionals interact with reality television and create meaning about how they understand, evaluate and characterize reality programming. According to Blumer (1969), the "varying and changing nature of what is presented by mass media does not favor the setting up of an independent variable with the true characteristics of homogeneity and constancy" (p. 186). By examining different individuals this research uncovered how different interactions with the text affected meaning creation. As a result, the present study builds onto the theory of symbolic interactionism.

In particular, the viewer data drove home the power of individual meaning construction as participants affirmed that how one characterizes reality

programming depends on one's interactions with the text and with reality in general. The viewer data demonstrates that meanings, and in particular definitional constructs, are created through interactions with texts (in the present analysis—reality television programs serve as the texts), people and self. These viewers recognized that how one interprets, analyzes and understands reality programming depends on how they interact with reality shows, how they interact with society and other individuals and what that means to themselves (i.e. how they construct meaning by who they think they are and how they fit within society).

The present analysis also has implications for other communication theories. First, focus group participants affirmed the resonance principle of cultivation theory. Cultivation theory maintains that viewers who are repeatedly exposed to a particular media portrayal will expect this media portrayal in real life (Gerbner, 1994). Resonance occurs when a viewer's everyday experiences mirror those shown on television, boosting the cultivation effect. Similarly, viewers maintained that if a reality television character's life closely resembled their own, then the viewer was more likely to believe that the reality being portrayed was real. Conversely, if the character on a reality television show was different than the viewer, that viewer was more likely to believe that the character and show were less real.

The current analysis also builds on the theory of uses and gratifications. Data revealed that these viewers watch reality programs, in part, because they brought communicatory utility (Rubin, 1994). That is, reality programs like

Survivor were water cooler shows, where communities would talk, analyze and debate about the show the next day at work, school or where ever. In addition to receiving communicatory utility, the viewers from the focus groups also disclosed that they watched reality programming so that they could put themselves in the shoes of the characters and hypothesize what they would do in the same situation. By entertaining the idea of how they would react as a reality participant, these viewers are meeting a surveillance and entertainment need, but they are also doing something more. By pretending to be in the situation of the reality show participants, these viewers are fulfilling a need to step outside their own reality and enter the one presented on television.

Reality television is a complex hybrid of several different genres—drama, soap opera, adventure, game show, comedy and documentary. Thus, what makes reality television so incredibly interesting to watch and examine, also makes it intellectually challenging to research. In addition to its dynamic and ponderous nature, the growth of reality programming and viewership make reality television an important and exciting televisual form to study. The current study uncovered how academics, viewers, media producers and professionals interpret, critically examine, understand and characterize reality television programming. Thus, the present analysis helps clarify not only what reality television is to different people from different perspectives, but also how different people think about its development, growth, popularity, production techniques, veracity and ontology. Most of all, this research has sparked an interest to pursue

more studies so that we can build on our knowledge base concerning the world of reality television programming.

Limitations

All research endeavors have their limitations and the current analysis is no exception. First, because the study embraces the qualitative paradigm, findings are not necessarily generalizable to other populations. In addition, because there are so few studies devoted to reality television, the textual analysis yielded little compared to the focus group, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Ideally, some data on academics' perceptions of reality programming should be gathered first-hand, probably through the use of in-depth interviews. Furthermore, more media producers and professionals working with reality programming should be interviewed to broaden and advance the data set. Availability and reliability of media producers served as a deterrent to completing more interviews. Finally, the participants of the focus groups, while representing the most coveted target market, were all young adults. More focus groups with both older and younger viewers would have enriched the data collected. Older and younger viewers might watch very different reality programs and have very different opinions than the young adults in the current study.

Future Research

Many of the limitations of the current study serve as motivation for future studies. As suggested above, future research on audience attitudes and evaluations of reality programming as it is being viewed could be done through observational and participant/observational analyses. By watching viewers'

reactions and discussion of reality programming as they view the content, data could be gathered on how analytical audiences are concerning reality content not in the abstract, but in the field. This would allow researchers to understand how reality programming is understood as it is being viewed as opposed to how it is dissected in a focus group. Also, focus groups with older and young viewers would enrich the audience data by gathering information on how different viewers think about and characterize reality programming.

In addition to building on some of the weakness of the current study, research on the integrative advertising techniques employed on reality television programs would be a fascinating endeavor. Shows like *Survivor* and *The Runner* are utilizing product placement as a means to bring advertisers, programming and consumers together. It would be interesting to examine how consumers/viewers look at ads within reality programming or if they recognize them at all. Also, studies from media and advertising professionals on the effects of integrative advertising on reality programs and the effectiveness of such advertising would also be of great interest.

Future research on some of the unique ontological questions concerning reality programming needs to be completed. How do viewers and society in general compare the reality shown on reality programs to the real world? Interestingly, participants in the focus groups maintained that how one characterizes reality television depends in part on how they define their own reality. How does the social construction of reality affect viewers' definition and interpretation of reality programming? In addition, do viewers believe in external

realism? That is, do viewers believe in a reality that exists outside and independent of their own interpretations. And finally, how do their interpretations of reality mesh with the interpretations of reality presented via reality television shows?

Finally, a first-hand observational analysis of the production of reality shows would bring fresh perspectives to light. For example, researchers could observe *Survivor* on site, observing the production techniques and the experiences of the participants firsthand. By witnessing the making of a reality program, researchers could gather information about (1) how producers interact with the people on the show; (2) how the production crew interacts with the people they are filming; and (3) be able to take in the experience of reality television production. Following reality programming from its conception to its production would give researchers exciting and stimulating data on the steps used to produce reality programs. In addition, a firsthand observational analysis would put the researcher in touch with the participants of the program within the context of the show. Building on the research gathered in the present analysis, data collected from a first-hand observational analysis would allow researchers to compare the answers given by producers during in-depth interviews, concerning the production of reality programs, to the actual experience itself. Thus, researchers would be able to see if the producers' comments about editing, casting and other production techniques matched up with what was actually done in the field.

APPENDIX A
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: How do academics characterize reality television programming?

RQ2: How do academics differentiate reality programming with other types of non-fiction programming?

RQ3: How does the current trend of reality programming differ from earlier reality-type programs like *Candid Camera* or *An America Family*?

RQ4: How do viewers characterize reality television programming?

RQ5: Are there varying degrees of reality programming (i.e. are there some reality shows that are more real than others?)?

RQ6: How are reality programs produced and how do these production elements differ from fictional shows?

RQ7: Do viewers believe it possible to capture reality and make it into a television show?

RQ8: If "reality television" is a misnomer, then what do academics, viewers and media producers and professionals mean when they call something "reality TV"?

RQ9: How do media producers and professionals characterize reality television?

RQ10: How do different groups of media users differ with respect to how they perceive, analyze and characterize reality television programming?

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT #1

Lisa Anne Joniak, a doctoral student in the Department of Telecommunications, College of Journalism and Mass Communications, is conducting a study on your views of reality television programming. Ms. Joniak is researching how television viewers define reality television programs.

This focus group is being supervised by Dr. Debbie Treise, Associate Professor in the Department of Advertising, at the University of Florida, College of Journalism and Communications.

If you agree to participate all of your answers will be confidential to the extent provided by law. You will not be identified in any way. Ms. Joniak is not asking for your name or any identifying information. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You may stop at any time without consequence. The focus group will take place in 2045 in Weimer and will take approximately one hour. The focus group will be video taped for transcription purposes only. The videotape will be kept in a locked cabinet in the faculty offices until it has been transcribed, and then it will be destroyed. A number will identify your image on the transcripts; Ms. Joniak is not collecting any identifying information. Only Ms. Joniak will have access to the transcripts.

There are no anticipated risks for participating in the focus group, but your participation will be beneficial in helping the researcher understand your views about reality television. In addition, by participating in this focus group you will receive five extra credit points from your instructor Ms. Howard in Personal Family and Health 2100.

If you have any questions about this interview, Ms. Joniak can be reached at 392-9755. If you have any questions about research participants' rights, you may call the University of Florida Institutional Review Board at 392-0433.

I have read the information provided above, and I have received a copy of this description. I voluntarily agree to participate in the focus group session as described. I have been told that the session will be video taped.

Participant Signature_____ Date:_____

APPENDIX C
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. What does "reality television" mean to you?
   Prompt: What are some shows on TV that you think are examples of reality television?
   Prompt: What is it about these shows that makes them reality television shows?
   Prompt: What sets (the shows mentioned) them apart from other shows?
   Note: If the participants ask the moderator what she thinks reality television is, then the moderator will respond that a defining feature of reality television programs is that they claim to present reality.

2. What reality television shows do you like to watch?

3. What is it about these shows that makes you watch them? (Do you watch them for information/news? Entertainment? Both? Or for some other reason?)

4. How do you think a reality television show differs from a fictional show?
   Prompt: How does *The Real World* differ from *Friends?* How does *FEAR* differ from The Blair Witch Project?

5. Are there varying degrees to reality television programming? That is, are there certain programs that are more reality based than others?
   Prompt: How could a reality television program have elements of fiction in it and still be a reality television show? That is, under what circumstances and with what approach could a reality television show use fictional elements?
   Prompt: Can you think of a reality television program that does incorporate fictional elements into its program? How does this program incorporate these elements? How do you feel about incorporating real and fake programming together?

6. How do you decide that show X is more reality-based than show Y? What is it about show X that makes it more reality based? What is it about show Y that makes it less reality based?

7. How accurate do you think the events and people portrayed on reality television shows are? Why do you think they are accurate/inaccurate?

Prompt: Do you watch the *Real World*? (If not, then the moderator will discover a show that the group does watch).
Prompt: After watching a season of *The Real World*, do you feel like you really know the people and their situations? Why do (or don't) feel like you know these people?

8. How do reality television programs in general make you feel like you are witnessing something real?

9. What are some of the steps taken in making a reality television show? How do these differ from fictional shows?

10. Do you think it is possible to capture reality and make it into a television show? Why or why not?

11. If 'reality television' is a misnomer, then what is it we *really* mean when we call something a "reality television program"?

APPENDIX D
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT #2-IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Lisa Anne Joniak, a doctoral student in the Department of Telecommunication, College of Journalism and Communications, is conducting a study on your views of reality television programming. Ms. Joniak is researching how television producers define reality television programs.

This in-depth interview is being supervised by Dr. Debbie Treise, Associate Professor in the Department of Advertising, at the University of Florida, College of Journalism and Communications. You may reach Dr. Treise by phone at (352) 392-9755.

If you agree to participate all of your answers will be confidential to the extent provided by law. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You may withdraw at any time without penalty. The in-depth interview will take place over the telephone and will take approximately thirty minutes. The in-depth interview will be audio taped for transcription purposes only. The audio tape will be kept in a locked cabinet in the faculty offices until it has been transcribed, and then it will be destroyed. Only Ms. Joniak will have access to the transcripts.

There are no anticipated risks for participating in the interview, but your participation will be beneficial in helping the researcher understand your views about reality television.

If you have any questions about this interview, Ms. Joniak can be reached at (352) 381-3554. If you have any questions about research participants' rights, you may call the University of Florida Institutional Review Board at (352) 392-0433.

I have read the information provided above, and I have received a copy of this description. I voluntarily agree to participate in the in-depth interview as described. I have been told that the session will be audio taped.

Participant Signature_____ Date:_____

APPENDIX E
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. How do you define "reality television"?
   Prompt: What are some other shows on TV that you think are examples of reality television?
   Prompt: What is it about these shows that makes them reality television shows? What common elements do you notice about these shows?
   Prompt: What sets (the shows mentioned) them apart from other shows?

2. Do you watch any other reality television programs?
What reality television shows do you like to watch?

3. Why do you like to watch these particular shows—i.e. do you watch these programs for entertainment or to keep up with the genre or both.

4. How do you think a reality television show differs from a fictional show?
   Prompt: How does *The Mole* differ from other fictional shows?

5. Are there varying degrees to reality television programming? That is, are there certain programs that are more reality based than others?
   Prompt: How could a reality television program have elements of fiction in it and still be a reality television show? That is, under what circumstances and with what approach could a reality television show use fictional elements?
   Prompt: Can you think of a reality television program that does incorporate fictional elements into its program? How does this program incorporate these elements? How do you feel about incorporating real and fake programming together?

6. How do you decide that show X is more reality-based than show Y? What is it about show X that makes it more reality based? What is it about show Y that makes it less reality based?

7. How accurate or how close to home do you think you do in accurately portraying the people and events on your shows? What are some of the challenges you face in achieving accuracy?

8. How accurate do you think *your audience* thinks the events and people portrayed on your show are? Now consider other reality programs, how do you think audiences gauge the accuracy of other reality shows?

9. How do reality television programs in general make audiences feel like they are witnessing something real?

10. What are some of the steps taken in making a reality television show? How do these differ from fictional shows?

11. Do you think it is possible to capture reality and make it into a television show? Why or why not?

12. If 'reality television' is a misnomer, then what is it we *really* mean when we call something a "reality television program"?

13. Why do you think the public and popular culture has labeled your work and other work similar to it "reality television"?

APPRENDIX F
FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT-FOCUS GROUP #1

L J: The first thing I want to know, the first thing I want to about is how you define reality television. When someone says that word what do you think of?

K K: I guess for myself, I don't really think about reality television until *Survivor* and that was like a big reality ice breaker or something. For me, not watching TV that much, as for what it's all about. For me, reality TV is basically like studying that person's life and recording life and seeing what's going on and basically like documentary of seeing what other people in their daily lives and all the interactions that they take day-to-day so you can see I guess how other people live besides yourself.

A Z: I think more of like *Real World*, because with *Survivor* they stuck those people on that island. How many people go to a deserted island? And so with like *The Real World* granted the stick together people but I know as far as like going to the dorms and then you have roommates you're stuck with those people to so it's kind of interesting to see how other people interact.

JP: I think that's the actual contradiction. I think you put people in an extreme situation and their true personality traits come out. If you stick some people in a room or an apartment and they're in a comfortable environment and they've got a camera on their face 24 hours a day, maybe they're just looking for an acting career. And so this is a good way for them to get their face out into the public.

K C: But at the same time they're playing for a million dollars.

J. P.: Oh yeah obviously.

K.C.: Do they get money on the *Real World*?

J. P.: I think at the end they do.

J.S.: I think on *Road Rules* they get a big gift at the end.

K.C.: You probably get something.

K.K.: I think you definitely like find yourself like what you're saying what I guess that girl on *The Real World*, I don't remember her name, the one with the big lips I guess everyone has their own issues and they find out about themselves, but I

think at the same time, for other people to see their lives. And I don't know that much about another person just by seeing, like a friend of mine and you really get to see how that friend and at the same time they're finding themselves. And realizing I guess the reality the way life really is. And I think on *The* Real World it's like different than *Survivor*, there's just different types, *Survivor*'s a lot harder, you're thrown on an island and you have to get your own food. I mean the it's just a different way of showing someone's reality. It's a different way of surviving. I've seen like I don't know what it's called but it's like motor homes where it's all see through and people live in it it's like a big motor homes and it's all see through there's like a bed and a shower and everything. And you can totally just like see them living. It just drives by on the street.

JP: Wow...

GROUP GIVES VARIOUS CALLS OF AMAZEMENT

K K: I saw it in South Beach. They travel across the country. It seems like everyone's doing reality stuff now I don't know. I guess *The Real World* is always been around the now but there's this *Survivor* thing I guess it's a hot thing now it's this huge thing and their trying to do all these like simulations of shows and...

DB: I don't really believe that it's all real. Like I think that real world it's a TV show they're obviously going to build things up larger than they are. If anything happens they're going to blow things out of proportion and package it. So it's anything I think at least I think so you know really how much of that is real and how much is packaged. Are they acting their part or...

JP: Exactly!

A C: Well with like anything they're going to do a bunch of like editing and stuff to make sure that it looks good...

K K: Well they do editing, like on Channel 7 News, I know that's not reality, but they don't show you the crappy stuff. They show you the stuff that'll keep your interest. So you're anticipating the show to see what happens. And I think the person themselves, they have to sign a contract at the beginning on what they want to been seen. But I think that with certain people, like they shouldn't show them having sex or like there should be certain parts of the bathroom that shouldn't be filmed, but I guess the extent of it depends on the individual person. "I don't want any relationship shown between me and my father," like "I don't want that documented." Or like if you could specify. I don't know.

LJ: Well you bring up a lot of good points. For making a distinction about, Angela had mentioned The Real World, and others had mentioned *Survivor* and so I want to get a feel about how you perceive these two different shows. Are they

really both the reality television shows and if so why? What makes them both reality programs?

JP: See my problem with *The Real World* and shows like that is basically just a live TV show because, the only difference between that and *The Real World* is there's no script so, if you have actors that do live performances on TV like we all remember some kind of series like a live series, and it's more like, it's considered reality TV because its showing the real things in life like a girlfriend and a boyfriend arguing about something. I guess if that's how you want to define reality TV as being, watching people as they interact or something like that, but reality to me is just a big contradiction. I do know reality TV to me is just a big contradiction. The only reality TV I've ever seen was fake and that was The *Truman Show* because he didn't know he was being filmed and to me that's like, the only way you can get reality TV because nobody acts the same when they're on camera. I don't care if you're on a deserted island. You're going to act differently because you have a camera in your face.

K. K.: I agree.

PAUSE OF SILENCE

JP: Sorry, I just killed the conversation.

GROUP LAUGHS

AZ: Nobody knows what to say after that.

MORE GROUP LAUGHTER

L J.: Is reality TV then a misnomer?

K C: That's one basic perception...

D B: Well, that's as real as you can get without people knowing and with the added, at least from my point of view, aspect of producers and what ever. I think as a general thing, that's about, it's the best that reality programming is going to get. I'm sure they're going to improve on it as it goes. I mean, they're gonna tell people, you know, that they're being filmed and let them go from there.

R B: I would say that producers have every intentions of trying to make reality TV, real TV, but it isn't. They set it up. People on camera act differently.

KC: I mean, producers are going to show you want they know people are going to watch. To get better ratings and stuff.

LJ: So, how do you think, tapping on your point, how do you think producers of a reality program act differently towards the characters in that program than say the producers of a non-reality program?

R B: I would say they try to affect them less. They try and not direct them as much as the other programs. They want it to be real and they want people to act on their own, but yet I think that there's certainly some directing.

LJ: In what way would they give some direction?

JP: The situation they put them in. I mean, the producers design where they live and where they're going to be filmed and the basic thing is you get put in an apartment or you get put on a deserted island and it's just kind of like an ant farm. You get to watch the ants crawl around the apartment or the island.

RB: They give you a trailer or motor home [cant' make out]...

JP: Yeah.

GROUP LAUGHS

LJ: Would you say that there are varying degrees to reality programming?

NODS AND AFFIRMATIVES FROM THE GROUP

LJ: What would you say, how would you distinguish these varying degrees? Can you give me some examples of the shows?

JP: I guess I'd characterize your *Road Rules* and *Real World* as your least reality based. Because you've just got these people put in a comfortable position to where you never know if they have some underlying motive to why they're there and maybe they did just want to be filmed to make money doing whatever they do and they're just trying to promote something of their own accord. Uh, I guess then the next step down would be something like *Survivor* where you're put in an extreme situation where even if you have an ulterior motive, you still have to act your own to survive basically. The going out and getting food, the forming of an alliance. Um, and then the next step is where the person does not know that they're being filmed. I guess that's where the ethical issues come in.

JS: Hidden camera

JP: Yeah, I mean it's an invasion of privacy. I guess you could kind of do it the same way *The Real World* only instead of having a big camera guy following you around have hidden cameras throughout the house.

AZ: I kinda like, I'm like the opposite of him...

KC: I'm the opposite of him...

AZ: because everyone, even though you [JP] say that they have certain motives behind going to, what's our motives?, it's our reality. I mean what's our motive for coming to this focus group? I don't know about you, but for me it was for me to get extra credit.

GROUP LAUGHS

AZ: So, of course, I would want to go to a place and have my rent paid for, for how ever long I'm there so that's like their reality and they just get a couple of benefits thrown in. But as far as like, like I said before, *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, they kind of like, it's too "do this, do this, do this." Like, with *Big Brother*, they're like "such, and such is gonna get kicked off today." I don't really like either *Survivor* or *Big Brother*, just not interesting to me.

KC: I think people are more apt to act normal in a familiar environment. Like, I think people are acting crazy on *Survivor*.

AZ: They're on their guard too much...

KC: Yeah, yeah and I just think the whole reality part is thrown out the window when they get the money involved. Like *Real World*, yeah they're giving you money to live, but I don't think they give you cash, but they pay for you to live. That would be like a scholarship here. It's the same thing, pretty much, kind of. I mean, they're telling you where to live and what to do, kinda, same thing. So, I think when they throw money in there, it changes a lot of stuff. I think *Real World*'s more reality than *Survivor*. And on top of that, on *Survivor*, there's fighting for like who's the strongest, who's the best, who's the...I don't wanna get kicked off...and they do crazy, crazy things that they would never do probably if they were in a normal environment. Like they wouldn't just go outside and start eating some bugs or something.

KK: See, I think just the opposite of what they're saying...

GROUP LAUGHS

KK: I feel like, *Real World* and *Road Rules* are cool to watch cuz there's like younger people doing stuff that we like, like she [KC] says, but *Survivor,* like I'll always miss *Real World,* but I'll always watch *Survivor*, because you're always caught on the edge of your seat to see who's going to get it. Like you watch it with your friends, we use to bet, like who's going to get kicked off. I mean, I thought it was stupid at the end when that dude came up and they had that whole tribal thing, but I thought the show was exciting. I think the *Real World* is cool too,

but I think they had a lot of stupid added stuff into it, like, and *Survivor* always had something cool. I haven't seen *Big Brother*.

LJ: So, the stuff that you're saying is added into *The Real World*, these external elements, what does that do?

KK: It's still a reality program. I agree with him [JP], with the three levels and the order. If you're going to record someone without anyone there it's against their constitutional rights or whatever, and I guess you can just throw everything else as to what's reality TV. You can break up reality TV into further subdivisions and you can have like extreme reality TV, when you're thrown into extreme situations, like you're thrown out in the desert and you have to survive…and I think the money was just an added incentive because who would want to go? That would be a way to get a million bucks and see who could survive. That was the whole point of the show. But as for me, my opinion, and what I prefer to watch, I prefer to watch something that's more exciting. To me, *Survivor*'s more adventurous, it's like more of an adventurous type show whereas *Real World*'s more like, I don't know, a basic thing to watch.

JP: I guess it also kinda depends on how you define your own reality and where in your life, like if somebody's video taping you at that exact moment maybe that was when you were really you. And I guess if you experienced a similar situation like I have, to what they were put on camera like *Survivor*, you know, for ten days I went on a hiking trip in New Mexico where I was a thousands miles from the nearest civilization and it was kinda like that and I felt a lot like during those ten days that I kind of grew into me and found out who I was and so I kind of associate a lot with those people on *Survivor*. Put into that situation, you really find out who you are. And if you've got a video camera there that's kinda cool because you see the development.

LJ: So there's a development of characters on reality programming? That's an element?

DB: I definitely…

JP: That's what I define them as. Because, I mean, if you're just watching people hang out, then go next door to your friend's dorm room and watch them hang out. You get the same thing. You can have it whenever you want. You don't have to wait for it to come on. So…

DB: So you [JP] think like *Survivor* at the beginning is not as reality as the end of the show?

JP: I'm sorry what?

DB: Like the beginning of *Survivor* maybe it wasn't as like reality…

AZ: As real…

JP: Right, because they were still comfortable, they still had a full, hot meal from civilization. As they were there more, they started to have to figure out like how to survive and that just kind of reverts you back to your instincts and your mind and your body and more who you are than the kind of face you put on around your friends, at least like your not-so-close friends. Everybody puts on a front.

KK: I also thought it was cool, on *Survivor*, how it showed in the end that everyone was basically selfish and all for themselves because everyone was trying for the million dollars. People were talking trash and ganging up and people really do do that in reality.

AZ: I think that, I don't know, that's just cuz there's a million dollars so therefore it's not really reality because say you put those people in like…where ever, they're jobs and stuff and there's nothing for them to gain. Do you [KK] really think…

KK: ?? jobs??

AZ: But they're not gonna…

JP: But see that's where the extreme situation comes in because you get to what they're really all about.

KC: But then if you, what if you took all the *Survivor* people and put them in *Real World*? Do you think you'd get the same thing?

JP: No because there wouldn't be anything at stake. You know they're lives are not at stake, a million dollars is not at stake, I mean…

KC: Exactly so what's real?

JP: That's, that's what I just said earlier, like how do you define your reality. Like, when are you really you? If you find that your really you hanging out at your dorm room, talking with your friends…

KC: OK, but now you're trying to say that your not really you right now because you're not in an extreme situation.

JP: Basically [smiling]…

KK: Like I think that tape [pointing to the video camera taping the focus group] is reality TV. This is us just talking. This is real. It's a real thing that's going on…

JP: Even though I've looked at the camera quite a few times since I've been in here because I remember that I'm being video taped. Even though...

KK: But it's still real because it's happening, it's like...I mean everything that's video taped is like basically real TV. I think without a script it's real TV. Like, it's really going on. People speaking their mind, but I think once you get into that category of real TV, then you've got so many subdivisions and then you could break it into, like what I was saying earlier. There's just so many different types of real TV, but I think you can classify everything as real TV when there's no script.

LJ: OK, then I've got basically a two-pronged question for you then. I want to talk about how things are externally manipulated and how that falls under, on this kind of a spectrum between basically just showing caught on tape videos to something that's highly edited. How do you classify...do you see stuff that's highly edited differently than stuff that's not highly edited and why?

AZ: I think that stuff that has...like *Big Brother*, I've seen *Big Brother*. I didn't think that was reality with them because there's like no windows, they're just cooped up in a little room, talking and it was just boring. It's just didn't seem real to me, like the whole that she [KC] said about *Fear*, it was too "go here, go here," I don't know what the word...like instructional, like "today you're going to get kicked off the show."

KK: Also, with TV, if you're gonna broadcast something, you've got to appeal to your market. You've got a target market and I mean, obviously I think there's a lot of editing that goes on in a lot of these situations, I mean I haven't seen *Big Brother*, but I remember on *Real World* they video taped them throwing a ball for just a long time and that was just the most boring thing to watch. They have to get something that's like, I guess, like what I'm saying, you want something that's going to appeal to your market and get good ratings and good credits and press releases and all that stuff. Like you need, that's the point of being on TV. You're not going to get good viewer ratings if it's not something that's appealing to people. So that's why I think a lot of stuff is edited, to get it on TV you have to edit it because people aren't gonna watch it. So they put in all the exciting and take out all the boring stuff just to keep you there, keep you watching instead of channel surfing. And I feel that the more you cut out, the less real that it is, but it's still real because they put the main points are there, but it's taking out the reality, but I think the only time you're going to find a real tape sitting there, not actually being put on the market. Like to do a 30 second commercial you have like 12 hours of footage. You edit it to get all the good parts. That's how, that's how, I mean I'm not in that field, but I think that's how it's usually done.

DB: But don't you think that they blow things out of proportion when they interview people and like "How do you feel about this thing?" like they pick a problem and they just like eat at it, and eat at it. There's a lot of problems in life

and yeah there's some big ones. I just feel that on *The Real World* they just take a problem and just milk it for what its worth and even more.

KK: No, I think they do to, but it's still problems that people face. Like I don't think the *The Real World* is like true, almost reality TV, but like I don't know that's almost what keeps people watching, people dealing with their problems.

DB: I agree with you, they have to show the good stuff, but I just feel like, every problem that someone has isn't that big of a deal. And all the problems on *The Real World* are like a big deal.

KK: Yeah, but with *Real World* they have an idea of how they want issues to come together. They have a plan. "OK, we want a gay person, we want a race car drive. They have a whole entire plan of what they want to put together. So that, again, diminishes the reality part because they pick certain people. They pick people who have certain problems, who they know are going to clash because that's going to be like stuff they're going to have on TV for people to watch.

KC: But they do the same thing on *Survivor*. They pick like a working woman, an old guy, wasn't one of the guys gay and one of the guys a military man…

DB: That's exactly, they pick…

KC: But if they pick everybody the same, then everybody's going to get along. There'd be no drama. That would take all the fun out of it.

KK: That's true, but it's still real. Real people interacting to eachother.

KC: Yeah…

KK: Cuz you're always going to be faced with people who's attitudes are diverse and different than yours. Either way, that's what everybody, I don't know. I debating about what I say earlier. It's real because it's on TV.

KC: It's just like saying "OK, let's get 10 girls who are really good friends and put them in a house and see what happens." Are we going to watch Katie and Kelly's adventures to the mall? No. You wanna see Katie and Kelly start going at it.

LJ: John what do you think?

JS: Um, I never really watched *Survivor*. I wasn't really into that at all. But one thing that I don't understand, it's reality TV, but when you're going after a million dollars, you're not going to be the same as if you're just put on an island. If you're going after a million dollars you're going to be just a whole lot meaner and just going after the money and don't care about anybody else.

JP: But isn't that a part of who they are?

KC: But when you…

JS: But I don't care, anybody in this room, if they're going for a million dollars against everybody else…

KK: But that's still you. It's real. That's like you, the way you really are…

KC: No. I don't' act that way. If I was going for a million dollars I would not act the way I act everyday.

KK: But that's my point. You get to see how everyone is going to act when you throw that in there…

KC: But is that reality?

KK: It's still real because that's the way you would really react.

JP: That's the way you would really act…

AZ: No, it's not the real way you would act everyday so therefore…

JP: But is the real way you react everyday who you are and what reality is?

GROUP STOPS AND LOOKS AT JP AND GIVES EXPRESSIONS OF "WHAT?"

JP: Is the way you act everyday…

AZ: Yes, the way I act everyday is who I feel I am and…

JP: And so this extreme situation had nothing to do with who you are…

AZ: Exactly, it's maybe a minor piece of who I am, but it doesn't make up me as a whole…

JP: But it's something you'd never see…

KK: It shows one side of you.

KC: It shows that one side, but at the same time it doesn't show that other normal…

KK: but everyone else has normal sides too, but it's just exposing everyone to just this one side of them you know. It's just a different aspect.

JP: And it's not one you get to see in your normal everyday life. That's another thing that makes it interesting because none of us have seen any of us in an extreme situation like that, but I see Kate every Monday, Wednesday and Friday and I see her in that reality, but I'll never be able to see what would happen if she was put in an extreme situation.

KC: But at the same time, you said you went on like a little camping, hiking adventure. So, do you think that if someone had told you it was over a million dollars you would have been different? Or that you would have had the same experience?

JP: I really think I would.

KC: Have the same experience?

JP: Yeah. Because of the situation…

GROUP GIVES WORDS OF DOUBT

JP: Well, what was the million dollars? Who finished the hike first?

KC: Well, were you guys allowed to bring like food with you and stuff?

JP: Yeah.

KC: Oh..

KK: No, I think that would have definite change it if there were a million dollars there. But I think that it's still the real you. It's still, everyone when you throw a million dollars in. It's not fake…

AZ: OK, I have a question…

KK: Unless you're just a fake kind of person, I don't know. But it's still going to be you. You're on TV. You're trying to get a million dollars.

JS: I didn't say it was fake. I just said that it's less real then if you didn't have the million dollar…

DB: That's just like saying somebody who's drunk, that that's really him…

KC: Yeah [laughs].

DB: He might really be like that one night a week or one night a month or who knows…

KC: That's why *Survivor* to me is like a big game show.

LJ: When John said that if the million dollars wasn't in there it would be "more real." What is it we mean when we say something is "more real"?

GROUP TALKS TOGETHER, CAN NOT MAKE OUT ANY ONE COMMENT

AZ: I think it means that the group can be more relaxed...

KC: Yeah, it wouldn't have to be about getting on top...

AZ: And people out to get me...

JS: You're always just fighting for the money and everything just goes out the window...

KK: There would've been no show without the million dollars.

JS: Exactly.

LJ: So, how does that tie into...

AZ: Not real because of the whole thing that you [KK] said earlier about gaining status in the workplace. Maybe that's something that I want to do for myself, to prove to myself...

KK: So you're going to act differently to get that...

AZ: Not necessarily...

KK: No, I'm not saying, you're going to test yourself just as others test themselves, but it's still you. It's like looking at you from a different view. I think everything that you record is going to be real because it's people reacting to different situations.

KC: So maybe to have just a totally completely real thing, they should have them go to a whole bunch of different situations. Like *Survivor* is all about lets fight for money, who's on top, whatever. And *Real World* was all we're at home, we're relaxed...

KK: But you can't bounce them around every where...

KC: Why not?

KK: You can't have a show, like how long would it last?

KC: But what I'm saying is would that be more realistic to us? Would you view that as more a realistic thing cuz you could see all the sides of people instead of just that one side?

KK: No, no. I think that would be better too. It's just that…

KC: Would that be more realistic to you?

JP: You guys are seeing…

KC: But I don't think you want to see everything about a person. I don't need to know your whole entire life. Like, who's gonna sit there and watch and know everything about you. But, it's still real because it's showing that side of them.

LJ: So do you think then that after watch a season of *The Real World* or *Survivor*, do you feel like you know the characters?

KK: I think in *Real World* you get to know the person more than you do with *Survivor*. Cuz I think that *Real World* is more like, they're put in a lot of circumstances whereas *Survivor* they're all for the money and they all just change…

KC: But what about like…what are some other reality TV show?

AZ: Like, so far I've noticed we've talked a lot about, like a whole bunch of people, like what about like *Diary* and stuff. Have you ever seen it? Where the person's talking to the camera and letting them know, but the camera is also following them around.

KK: Like, if you were going to produce a show and make it as real as you could make it, what would you do?

AZ: What would I do?

KK: Let's say that it's your job to make it as real as you thought it was and you had to make it and you had to make it appeal to everyone.

JP: Well, that's where the marketing of the show's gonna have to come in and the producer's affect on the show…

KK: So what would you do? Tell me.

JP: Well, you're going to have to make situations that leave cliffhangers, that you can show two minutes of commercials and have people stay tuned. Obviously, so that they watch the show and you can get your ratings.

KK: So how do you think you can still make that real though? Because to have those cliffhangers, that means that you're going to have to edit a lot right?

JP: Exactly. But that just goes back to how real is it when you've got a camera in somebody's face? I mean if you know that a billion people are watching you, then how real is it? Like, are you just going to be who you are and be really comfortable with yourself to put yourself naked in front of, I'm not talking physically naked, but mentally naked and not like drop down any kind of guard or any kind of anything and just let the world know who you are. I mean to me that just takes a great deal of self confidence in who you are.

KK: Do think you can act without putting up a front for that long?

GROUP TALK, CAN NOT DISTINGUISH

DB: I think you're always gonna have, like if somebody makes you mad you're not just gonna like cussing them out. Or like behind their back. Like, if someone makes me mad I might not say anything to their face, but I might talk to my friend about it and say "That guy really fricken pissed me off", but then if they put a camera in my face I might be like "He made me mad [in a robotic tone]."

JP: Yeah, exactly.

KC: Or vise versa. You could at the same time dramatize the whole thing…

DB: Exactly.

LJ: So then with the cameras, as an element, do you think you know more about Richard Hatch then you do Newman?

JP: I don't think so. I don't think so at all. I mean, I guess you could say, "Well, Richard Hatch didn't have a script in front of him." And Newman has a script in front of him. I guess you could say that you know a little more about Richard because he kinda had to make up his own script. But it's still a script. You're still not getting the real person. You're still getting script. And whether somebody wrote it for you or you're writing it yourself, it's still not really you.

AZ: That kinda contradicts what you just said though on the whole *Survivor* thing cuz you were like "Oh, that's who you are"…

JP: You still have this outside forcing you to do things you normally wouldn't have to do in an apartment just hanging out doing whatever.

AZ: I still don't see…

JP: Well, what I'm trying to say with the *Survivor* aspect and apartment scene is you still got a part that has to be you. There's gonna be that aspect of you that's gonna go out and get your food. You know, there's going to be that aspect of you that's going to survive. And then there's this other part where you've got other people at an apartment there's really nothing causing them, there's nothing to break them out of their face, out of their shell. You would have a lot more difficulty on *Survivor* in your shell, your front, like who you put on for the TV camera. Whereas if you're in a comfortable situation, you can sit in your shell and live out six weeks in a shell and come out and you're OK. I think you just have a lot more difficulty putting up a front when you're on a show like *Survivor*, put in an a extreme situation.

RB: Doesn't that define the person? Like on *Survivor*, they're extremely defensive and, I don't want to use a curse word, but to others like really bad…

GROUP LAUGHS

RB: Does that define who they are? Is that…

JP: I don't think that's who they really are at all.

[KC GIVES A LOOK OF DISBELIEF AND SMILES]

JP: It's like I said…

KC: So what's real about it? How is that real?

JP: I mean…

KC: If you want to really see how somebody really is…

GROUP TALK, CANT DISTINGUISH

KC: To see how I really am you're not gonna go throw me in the middle of nowhere and be like "There you go. How are you really?" You're gonna watch what I do in everyday life…

KK: I don't think it's possible to get a true, true, real, real, like I don't think it's possible.

LJ: So, then what is it we mean when we call something a "reality television show"?

KC: It's not real!

KK: I think it's just a way to categorize it where there's no script and no director.

LJ: But a game show has no script…

KK: But that's a game show it already has a name

GROUP LAUGHS

LJ: What distinguishes reality programming then?

JS: It's just taping people in their everyday lives. Like *The Real World*, they just go around taping…

AZ: But *Survivor*'s not everyday life…

JS: Yeah…

KK: But it's still reality TV…

AZ: But then why isn't a talk show reality TV? Cuz those are people…

KC: That's real, yeah, why aren't talk shows real?

KK: How about *Jackass*?

GROUP LAUGHS

JP: That's actually real TV. I'm pretty sure.

KK: Isn't that real TV? That's actually my favorite one. I forgot about that…

KC: It is?

KK: Like would you consider that reality?

AZ: I think that's…crazy.

KK: But it's funny.

KC: But don't people get things for doing that crazy stuff?

JP: No.

AZ: No.

KK: I consider it a real thing. It's getting people's real reactions…

KC: But what is it that you consider real? No script?

KK: Yeah, they're just like, "Go down there and do this."

KC: But I mean is that what we consider real for every show, no script?

KK: That's what I consider real. When there's no like set script and no defined path that you have to go down. Like in any second you can go somewhere else…

JP: In a game show you have no set path…

KK: Yeah, I think, like when your at the point of doing like *Survivor* or *Real World*, there's still gonna be editing. I don't think there's true way to get real, real, life TV. You can't, there's no…

JP: You couldn't market…

KK: Yeah…

KC: In order for it to be real, you'd have to show everything, right?

KK: Yeah. I don't think there's technically a real, real, reality TV, but as a way to say it, it's half reality TV and they're just going to classify it as reality TV where there's no script, but there has to be some direction. There has to be some direction in the show. Because you have to appeal to people, but I think it's using…

JP: Maybe a better term for real TV is "as real as it can get TV."

KC: Yeah…

DB: Or, like I was thinking, somehow they could put cameras in someone's house and tell them that they're there…

JP: Exactly…

DB: And have 'em there long enough and not have them on all the time…

KC: Or not tell them where they are…

DB: Like, if a camera was in my house and I didn't know where it was or when it was on eventually I would forget about it. It might take two or three years…

GROUP LAUGHTER

DB: If you're not thinking about it, then you're being who you really are. I'm just saying if you leave them in there long enough and hidden in a book or in a lamp. You couldn't do this for a TV show, but you'd get reality TV.

KK: I don't think there's anyway to get real reality TV, there' no possible way…

GROUP TALK, CAN NOT DISTINGUISH

KK: There's no way…

JP: But, if you knew there were cameras in your house, you still got the affect of huge pieces of machinery in your face. Whereas with that the environment is more reality-based. If you walk into your house and you don't see a cameraman standing there you're going to be more…relaxed.

AZ: But you get used to the camera people, like you said.

KC: Think about surveillance cameras. Video taping people. They don't know they're being video taped.

DB: I mean, you forget about them. I don't walk into a bank and think about "Oh, I'm on camera." I act how I act.

KK: But when you walk in to a bank you're just coming up to do your stuff. They need something that's going to be able to show like…

KC: But that's real. Did you ever see that surveillance show? Where people did some crazy, crazy stuff?

JP: Oh, that surveillance tapes, I saw that. That was crazy.

KK: Dude, that's fun to watch, you know what I'm saying…

KC: Exactly.

KK: But…

KC: That's real! <u>That's real!</u>

KK: Yeah, that's real.

LJ: So, now I want to go back to the genre classification. Let's throw out some names of shows and tell me where they fit on this spectrum that we're creating. Now there was some debate about *Real World* and *Survivor* as to which one was more real, so let keep them over here. Now where does a show like *Jackass* fit? More or less real?

AZ: I think less real.

KC: Me too.

JP: I don't know, I can't…

AZ: Dude, stuff like that gotta be scripted…

JP: I don't know…

GROUP TALK, CAN NOT DISTINGUISH

JS: It's real but it's fake…

JP: Yeah, I don't know. That's why I can't comment on that.

AZ: They know what they're going to do beforehand so it's not real.

JP: Yeah, that's why I can't comment on that because I don't know if it's scripted. But, I've gone out with my friends on a Saturday night and done some crazy stuff like they've done on that show and…

AZ: Like being upside down in a Porta-Potty?

GROUP LAUGHTER

JS: Or kayaking in a water fountain…

MORE GROUP LAUGHTER AND TALK

DB: I'd say the guy on it is not real but, because he's the one doing it, like he went out to do whatever, but like I saw him get a guy to swallow a goldfish and cough it up. Like he walked up to this guy and be like "Hey will you swallow this goldfish and cough it up." That's pretty real because it's not like they scripted that guy to do it.

LJ: Well, if he is an actor, playing out certain skits, then what is real about *Jackass*?

JP: The reaction of the people that he does the skit with that don't know, they weren't part of making the skit.

DB: It's kinda spur of the moment, "How do you wanna do this?"

KK: They get peoples' reactions. That's real.

AZ: So, what about *Tom Green*?

KK: I haven't seen it.

AZ: You haven't seen *The Tom Green Show*?

KK: [shakes her head]

AZ: Whoa!

DB: You should 'da seen her eyes, she was like…

AZ: He goes and he gets peoples' reactions.

KC: He gets beat up sometimes too.

KK: That's real…What's the definition of real?

LAUGHTER, GROUP TALK

LJ: What about *A Wedding Story*?

WOMEN GIVE LOOKS OF EXCITEMENT AND COMMENT "OH I LOVE THAT ONE." WHILE THE GUYS GIVE SIGHS AND ONE COVERS HIS FACE LIKE "OH NO!"

AZ: I think when they interview and they're kinda like "Oh baby, I love you." They try an play it out to be real but it's not really real. But as far as like the wedding ceremony and stuff like that, that's real TV.

KK: Well, what's the name of the show where they go on a blind date?

JP & AZ: *Blind Date*.

LAUGHTER

LJ: They also have *A Dating Story*.

AZ: And *A Makeover Story*…The Learning Channel.

LJ: More or less real, on that spectrum?

AZ: More real than *Jackass* and *Tom Green*…

KC: Less real than *Real World*…

AZ: Eh, I don't know…

KK: I'm starting to think that there's no real TV now.

AZ: I know.

KK: I mean there's sitcoms with scripts and actors and actresses and there's movies, but like *The Daily Show* and *Jerry Springer* all those are real. They're still taking about real life issues.

DB: You mean because they're talking about something…

KK: No, I mean, it's different, but it's still all real.

AZ: I think boring is real.

RB: I would say that it's real if you're not playing a character. You're not playing someone else.

KK & KC: Yeah.

RB: Like *Seinfeld* for example wouldn't be real because they're all playing characters. Michael Richards is Kramer and so on.

JP: I think with reality it up in the air with where it's going to end. But even then the producers, I'm sure, have some say in where it's gonna end.

DB: But if they didn't and the people in it didn't know then I'd be…

JP: That'd be real.

LJ: I think we've touched on everything that I wanted to get to so I just wanted to open up the discussion for anything that I might not have asked you about that you wanted to make sure you've voice your opinion on. Any finishing thoughts that you might have.

SILENCE

RB: I don't know, I'm good.

LJ: Joe, I know you've got something to add.

GROUP LAUGHTER

JP: I think a lot of this is just…there really is no reality if you really want to get into that discussion, but um, if you want to believe…you can make any show that you watch real if you want it to be. If you want to believe that Jerry Seinfeld is actually this person, then maybe he's in some kind of fictional situation, but if he were put in the exact same situation he'd act the exact same way. So, you can make any show any way you want it to be in your mind. So, I guess it comes in to where you define your reality.

LJ: So what do you [JP] mean when you call something a "reality television program"?

JP: I think, I wouldn't call something real television till it came down to something like *The Truman Show*. Where he's just grown up and never known that he's being video taped but he is.

LJ: [can't make out]

JP: Exactly, I really don't believe in real TV anyway.

KC: Any more [laughs].

AZ: I thought I did…

JP: No, I came in here and I knew that I didn't believe in reality TV.

KC: Uh, well…I thought it could be real, but…

AZ: I thought I could define it.

KK: Um, I don't think there's really any true reality TV and like he [DB] was saying, like maybe after years of videotaping that you could get a reality thing, but that's not really gonna happen. But as far as like defining reality TV, I still think like there's real truth in every single show where's someone's not acting someone else. Where they're acting themselves. I think that could be considered real TV, but I think when you want to be calling stuff "reality TV" you're not gonna be calling those type of things reality TV even though there is some truth and real life stuff going on. I think with more like *Real World* or *Survivor*, I haven't seen *The Truman Show*, but I think with stuff like that you're gonna start calling that reality TV shows. That's what I would call reality TV before I came in. But, I guess technically there is no reality TV.

LJ: But what do you guys, I assume that when you go out into the world outside of this room and you call something a reality TV show or after this are you just not going to use that word any more. What is it that you mean? What is it that everyday people mean when they call something a "reality TV show"?

GROUP TALK CAN NOT DISTINGUISH

JP: It's something that they've made up to be real in their minds. Like, they see this thing on TV and they feel that that is reality to those people...

KK: Yeah, exactly. Some people think it's reality and some people don't. I think like he [JP] was saying before that it kinda depends on your own definition of reality to themselves.

JP: I mean, you can try and classify it like you can try and classify people as being white or black, but nobody's really black and nobody's really white. I mean, you've got some kind of end to the spectrum somewhere. Like you've got one end of the spectrum being completely fictional cartoon show and you've got the other end that would be, I guess, something like *Real World* or *Survivor* or something where you've got at least real people, they're real. But, I guess, people define real TV as realer than what they've seen because basically what's been on TV since the 1950's is like sitcoms, you know, something that's had some storyline, some plot., but now you've got TV shows that are impromptu. People are given, saying "Here's your time in life," you know "We'll pay you a million dollars to do it."

KC: Realer, realer than what we've seen.

KK: I agree.

KC: There we go. That's it.

KK: Cuz, I think also you've music categories, you have like rock and roll, hip hop and stuff. And some types of music are a mixture of a bunch of stuff. And I think reality TV is something that we categorize, the closest definition is like what he's saying. It's just different than what we've seen. It's just realer than the other stuff, just comparing to the stuff before. But then again, is that really real? Yeah, I know I'm just saying, but that's what we call "reality TV" cuz it's different than what we've seen. And that's the only name we can give it.

GROUP APPLAUDES

LJ: Well, thank you so much. Thank you for your participation.

(end of focus group)

APPENDIX G
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT-PARTICIPANT MS

LJ: Can we start off by you just giving me a little bit of information about your position and what you do at *TV Guide*.

MS: I'm a national writer at *TV Guide*. I write cover stories, feature stories, and I have a column every week called "Hollywood Grapevine."

LJ: Why don't we just go ahead and throw out the big one. How do you define reality television?

MS: I define reality television apparently much broader than most people because I don't think there's been an incredible surge in reality programming. Reality television has always been a staple of TV since the very beginning days of television and it always will be. What we have seen is a bunch of shows that use real people and put them in unreal situations, whether its *Boot Camp* or *Temptation Island* or *Survivor* or any number of a slew of programs coming up like *Fear Factor*, *Spy TV*, *Love Cruise*, *The Amazing Race* - tons of them are coming. There's one thing that connects them all and that's is they find real people, that is, people who aren't professional actors, and put them in front of the cameras and watch them do stuff that they wouldn't ordinarily be doing in their lives, like lying in a pit of snakes or rats or going to an island or the outback without all the toys that people normally have, and dealing with not having food or 7-11's down the block. These are all very unreal situations. Supposedly these people are quote real unquote. The thing that makes them not normal is that they are the kind of person who would seek to do something like this in the first place and that of course takes them out of the giant normal range into the something-other-than-normal range, because they're motivated to do this not mainly for the money but because they'll be on TV and it's something they'll never get a chance to do in their life.

LJ: You made a very interesting comment about how reality television has always been here and it's always been a staple of television. Maybe you could just talk a little bit about what are some of the previous shows that have been around and how has it happened now that there's this label of reality television. Because even if reality television has been around for a long time, this label of quote unquote reality television is relatively new, at least as far as I know.

MS: Oh it is and the reason is that it's kind of stupid to call the news reality television. But that's exactly what it should be. Naturally, since TV began, the

news has been one of the most important services television provides. It connects us all. It's had a dramatic effect on the world. By connecting us to one another – if the news ain't reality TV, I don't know what is. That certainly is one thing that's been with us since the beginning of television. But we've also had other talk shows like the early Tonight Show with Steve Allen, Dave Garroway in Today and things like that where much more so than today, we would see real people. Oh, it's mainly celebrity-driven, everything is celebrity-driven, and I think that's one of the reasons that these shows are enjoying a bit of success. We're sick of celebrities. There's a survey out now which says that more people know Brittany Spear's name than the Vice President of the United States. It goes on and on and on about how celebrities are basically the driving force in the world when it comes to the media. I think that part of it, kind of the initial fascination with shows like Survivor is that we don't have these whiney-assed actors who get paid a million dollars a week and bitching and moaning the whole time about how small their trailer is. We don't have to deal with these. Just everything we see on television, it's a plug for something, even when the news, local news, they're plugging the show on that night – every stupid star – they're so many stars. It used to be that there was maybe 15 and they were movie stars, giant stars, and maybe there's be Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris. There were much fewer stars. Now everybody's a star and it's just enough already. So finally I think one of the reasons that – when Survivor came on nobody thought the show was going to do what it did. When it came on, not only did it do well because it was a good idea, but it did well because we we're so sick and tired of celebrities. Screw 'em.

LJ: Interestingly though, the people on Survivor have become celebrities.

MS: It is interesting and hilarious. What was even funnier was watching Big Brother and having these people talking as if they were going to be celebrities, as if the whole country was watching their every move, when in fact it was pretty much the opposite. The whole country was yawning. That was what I thought was interesting about Big Brothers, how these people thought the whole – they were aware that the whole world was supposed to be watching them. Unfortunately for them, the world wasn't watching, so it just goes to show that not every reality show is an automatic hit. They've got to do more than have real people on these shows. They've got to have the right real people, the right mix of people, and the right thing for them to be doing, whether it's testing your love on Temptation Island or testing your mettle on Boot Camp.

LJ: Yeah, it seems like on Big Brother – they had a test where they had to jump up and down or – that's not really, it's kind of pointless you know, pointless tasks for them to be completing.

MS: Another reason that people are trying to gravitate – this is the worst thing in the world for professionals in Hollywood. They can't stand reality programming. I think it's hilarious. They're talking about how evil it is and awful it is and they

want it to stop, because of course it hurts them in the pocketbook. But the funny thing is, if they'd just stop writing such crap and – I really believe that people are just so sick of all these stupid sitcoms and dramas. We've got five cop shows – five New York City cop shows on TV right now. Enough! They happen to be some of the best shows on television. It doesn't matter. It's enough. So one of the things that is attracting people to reality programming is the fact that it's different and new.

LJ: Do you think there are varying degrees of reality programming? In other words, do you think that there are certain programs that are more reality-based than others?

MS: You know what, if it's on TV and if it's a TV show, it's not reality. I went to *Survivor*. I went to Borneo and camped out on the island and watched them shoot the show. I went to Belize and watched them shoot *Temptation Island*, and all you're seeing is what the producers package into the show for you to see. So there are certain things – and all the contestants – it's hilarious – every one of them, whether it's Survivor or *Temptation Island* or whatever, they think that through the editing they're made to look stupid or obnoxious or mean. They don't realize that this is editing. This is a process of editing. You get rid of the junk and you keep the conflict, the interesting things, the stuff that will make people go wow, and you put that in the show. This is a TV show, it's not reality. Do I think that some reality shows are more real? No, they're all the same. They're just real people doing unreal things. There's nothing real about any of them. There are some – if you want to talk about reality programming, there are tons of shows all over the dial that are doing well and that are real. There are shows where you can see a real veterinarian working on animals, stories about the animals. Shows where you see real doctors in an emergency room.

LJ: Like TLC's Trauma?

MS: Yes. There are shows where you can watch a couple through the process of dating and moving to marriage and getting married and having a baby, and those are separate shows. These are real people and they are much closer – they're not quite a documentary but they're close. That's reality TV but that's not what people mean when they talk about reality TV.

LJ: Okay. That's an incredibly interesting point, because some people that I've talked to think of TLC as being reality programming all the way through to Survivor as being reality programming. Your opinion is a little bit different so I want to draw that out a little bit.

MS: I think when people talk about reality – when we talk about reality TV – we're not talking about a doctor – we're not talking about documentaries, even though in 1970, I believe, the very first reality TV, even though the phrase didn't exist, was An American Family. That was the first time that people, real people –

I mean TV was something – the first time that real people had cameras in their homes and in effect forgot that the cameras were there and we supposedly saw what a real American family was like. We're not seeing anything about what – on The Learning Channel or Discovery or any number of these networks that have these programs – that's closer to just showing – that's closer to documentaries, except it's shot in a different way and basically we're just seeing someone work. We hear a little bit about what maybe – if it's a vet what the animals are going through, who the animals' owners are. It's *(inaudible)* but it's not a documentary where you actually really learn something meaningful and there's some depth to it. This is kind of surface stuff where you see a doctor save an animal and you go wow that's neat, but you don't learn much about anything except that people look like their dogs. The difference – you could say that all of this stuff does fit under the umbrella of reality TV. But that's not what, when people talk about reality TV, we're not talking about the vet on Channel 9. We're talking about this kind of relatively new genre where producers take real people and do unreal things with them, in the name of ratings. That's kind of what people mean when they're talking about reality TV. They're not talking about the news and they're not talking about the vet on Channel 99.

LJ: Why do you think this term reality television has come to the surface? I guess this would be another interesting subject to see where it was first coined and how this happened.

MS: I have a feeling it was first coined long before Survivor. Survivor really made everybody – because so many people watched it and it just caught on like wildfire, mainly because it debuted in the summer and there is – if you're already sick of sitcoms and – the stupid sitcoms they're putting on the air – the networks failure rate is eighty percent, which is – in any other industry you'd be looking for work elsewhere, but in network TV that's about the way it is. Eighty percent of the shows they put on the air every fall, fail. The twenty percent that are left, you can wait five years before you get a real streaming blockbuster shed *(?)*. So that's – every once in a while something really great comes along on television. Well, it happened to be Survivor. It caught on very slowly. In the summer – again, if you're sick of all the repeats the summer is the worst time of the year. Of all the sitcoms and dramas the summer is the worst because all they have is – at times sixty to eighty percent of the shows on, you've already seen. Nothing worse than that. So here comes *Survivor* and it works different, it's on an island, it didn't look like *Gilligan's Island* and there weren't any celebrities. There really wasn't even a host. It was just a bunch of real people and they were doing some funny-assed stuff. They were hungry. They were dirty. They weren't wearing makeup. They didn't have their hair all fixed up like everybody else does on TV. Everything about the look of the show was different, something we weren't used to and people – it was a total water cooler show. People started talking about it. Did you see that show last night? Each week the ratings went higher and higher and higher. It also happened to be just a factor of the nature of the show, which is that as there are fewer and fewer contestants, you get more and more into the

people there. You learn about them, and also it gets more and more intense for them and more and more interesting for the viewer. So it was just a natural. It just streamed all the way to the end of the show and then set record ratings. You knew that this was going to be done again. But the real show that I guess got people interested in watching non-celebrities was the Real World. This is a show that's been on what – nine years? I don't know that anybody ever coined a term reality TV when they were talking about The Real World, because again, there's not a whole bunch of reality in the situation where you dump all these strangers into this unbelievable house in a really cool city and just watch the stuff fly. It's not real. It's unreal to be living in a room with a stranger, where there's a camera in the wall looking at you all the time. There's nothing real about it.

LJ: I guess then you know, I'm still coming back to this quandary of mine is – if it is unreal and if this is a misnomer, then why do we call it – why are we still fixated on this term reality television?

MS: Because you have to call it something. The thing that – it's kind of the big lie, because there's nothing real about reality TV shows, except for one thing, and this is why they call it that. They're real people. They don't call *Jerry Springer* reality TV. There are real people on that show. But it's real people doing something. Not talking on *Jerry Springer*. Just real people reacting to real people in an unreal situation. The TV part of it is that it's a setup, it's a game. There's a hook. There's something that they're throwing at these people to get a reaction. If you just turn cameras on real people what you would get would be a great way to go to sleep every night. If you just had cameras on the people on *Survivor* Island or in the outback, you would just – it would be the biggest bore on television, because ninety percent of what they do is nothing. They sit and wait and there's nothing exciting. There's nothing exciting about seeing them walk an hour and a half to a tribal council, so you don't see it. There's nothing exciting about seeing them twice a day walk an hour for water, so you don't see it. What you do see is the interactions, the conflicts, the flare ups. There's a new show coming on called *Fear Factor*. I also saw them shoot that and what they do is they try to see what you're afraid of, basically, if your fear will prevent you from finishing the show. You win fifty grand each week, each episode. Six people – three women, three men – and they have to do three things. Some of the people, when they are simply shown snakes, or whatever, just go crazy. They start screaming. There's a show on MTV called *Fear*, which is unbelievable, the reactions you get from these people that take part in this. If they put cameras on their heads and stuck them in the middle of a street in New York City and said, 'Go ahead and walk around and see if it scares you,' again, it would be a complete bore and a failure. It would be unwatchable. So they've got to come up with a term for what they're doing here, and what they're doing is taking real people and putting them in unreal situations which are controlled by the producers. This is a TV show, it is for entertainment. They need something to happen, so they call it reality TV. The could just as easily have called in unreality

TV or not-reality TV, but again they've got to come up with something and it's just because there are real people. It's like almost a no-brainer to call it reality TV.

LJ: I guess, if you wouldn't mind talking a little bit about your experiences visiting these different sets and tell me –

MS: One thing you don't see, for instance, on Survivor, is what I told you. You don't see all the incredibly boring things that they do for forty days, which is basically a lot of nothing. A lot of lying around on the beach. Another thing you don't see is that they at times they're surrounded by forty, fifty people. They're not alone. When they do challenges they will bring the two tribes out to the challenge and if they're not ready, if the cameras are not ready, the lighting isn't right, if the set decoration isn't perfect, they hold them. This is a TV show first. That you kind of forget when you're watching the shows. Just like they kind of get so used to the cameras, it's like they – the people on Survivor Island, the first Survivor, knew the radio codes for the helicopter, because they would hear these things kind of bark out over the radios that the crew members would have and so they would know. They would know when the copter was coming in for an overhead shot. One of the reasons that these – the main thing to me is that you see how media savvy these people are. Of course they are media-trained. They do get a heavy dose of media training. They're picked because of the way they are on camera. Remember, they submit videos to become a contestant. They've got to be good on camera or they're never going to see the light of day on this show. But also what I find very interesting is how so many more people are comfortable being in front of cameras now.

LJ: So do you see any major differences between the Survivor set and the Temptation Island set?

MS: Yeah. You don't get any drinks with umbrellas on Survivor Island. Temptation Island, which was much more sort of contrived – the funny thing about Temptation Island is that they have the singles line up at the pool, the women on one side and the men on the other and the couples were at the head of the pool – after they did their initial – this is very – did you see it?

LJ: Yes, I have all of them on tape.

MS: This is the very first episode where they were kicking people off the island and also putting bracelets on them to ban them from dating their honey, and then the couples left. The couples didn't even know they were going to be separated, by the way. We didn't know anything about the game. Neither did the singles. I flew in with one of the singles and she was clueless, had no idea what the hell was going on except it was just something to do with couples and singles, which of course will be very different the second time around that they do Temptation Island. Now everybody is going to know. Of course most of the people on Temptation Island were interested in something to do with the public, acting,

models, playboy, musicians, artists. They all had a reason for wanting exposure. So maybe it's the new – it's even more commercial than just a regular sitcom because these – everyone has something they want to sell, but after the couples were shoed away from the pool a few of the single women kind of kind of just got in the pool and then the cameras started rolling on them. Then a few more of them got in the pool. They noticed when the cameras were rolling and when they weren't. Then the guys started getting in the pool and then the single guys and the single girls started kind of gravitating toward one another and the producer said no, stop, get them all out of the pool, because he said this is not what this show is about. We don't want these singles hooking up, so they kept everybody very separate on that show. The singles were in one resort – the single girls were in one resort with the men, obviously, the males from the couples, and the single guys were at another resort with the women from the couples. What you don't see is the process of shooting a TV show. If you did you'd see this is much more like any other TV show that you tape. The reality part is in – the only thing real about the show is that there are people who aren't professional actors and actresses who are taking part in it.

LJ: One thing that's kind of interesting is the recent comment that Mark Burnett made about using re-creations of events, that he would get a better shot.

MS: Yeah, that was stupid and when – it was really stupid of him to do that. What he should have done – but there was a lot of pressure on him from the first show to the second show. They really put – they got more cameras and this is something CBS wanted to do – they got tons of more cameras involved. They really wanted to jack it up a little bit and make it even better. They got a lot more attractive people in the cast. You saw immediately that even with the success of Survivor, the TV people want to make it more and more and more fake, which is not have real people, not have a truck driver, a female truck driver, not have a crotchety old ex-Navy Seal and then have more younger, hotter people. That's not real. So it's just impossible for these TV people to leave well enough alone. They can't leave reality alone. They can't. Reality is not good enough. It doesn't look good, know what I mean? They've got to have somebody in the back doing hair and makeup and making sure that the backdrop is pretty and have the right lighting. They don't know real.
LJ: That's a wonderful statement.

MS: But it's true. That's why Burnett got in trouble on the second show because he never would have done that shot on the first show, never, but the pressure was on him to make it look better and he did. They do – the thing you can't do is retake stuff, re-shoot a challenge, and he didn't do any of that, which is good. But to fake something with doubles of the contestants just takes a little bit away from the credibility of the show. Now you don't know what else is faked here. So that was a really stupid thing for him to do. It doesn't harm the show in any way but it's just dumb. On the other hand, you've got Stacey Stillman from the first Survivor complaining that it was fixed, basically, that it wasn't real, wasn't fair and

that it was a big lie. Well, this is an example of someone who can't look at herself in the mirror and see something that isn't there. She is an obnoxious jerk and that's why they threw her off the island. She can't accept it. She would have been – the idea of her lawsuit is so ridiculous on its face that CBS and Mark Burnett conspired with other contestants to vote her off in order to save the older demographic, keeping Rudy on. For 20 years networks have been trying to dump the older demographic and now they're trying to keep it at CBS? The silver-haired network. It's just preposterous. I ran into her off the island, before she came back, and she was an obnoxious jerk then and she was obnoxious on the show and that was why they voted her off. But it's funny, you know, that here's reality TV and you've got two lawsuits already. You've got the lawsuit from Stacy Stillman suing because she says the show wasn't real and you've got the couple on Temptation Island suing saying the show wasn't real – the producers knew that they had a baby. You don't know about that one?

LJ: No I didn't.

MS: Remember Temptation Island's Taheed and Watashi, the African-American couple? Well, after week three they were removed from competition, but they kept shooting them because they were – the producers found out they had a child, and of course on Temptation Island everybody was in an uproar about the show because it was morally reprehensible, but everybody who thought that they were using married couples – and of course that would be wrong – even then, they said committed couples and it's still wrong – well, we saw how committed they really were. It's just young people who are – it's a very interesting concept and people are tempted every day. I saw nothing wrong with the concept of the show. They agreed to be there. But what I keep seeing that is wrong is that they're not doing sufficient background checks to make sure that things like the Rick Rockwell restraining order – that he may or may not have been violent toward women. They should be doing that for their own good because God forbid if he was a violent guy and they did get married and he beat the shit out of her, obviously she could turn right around and sue the crap out of CBS or Fox, for that one. The same thing with Temptation Island. Here you have a show – if you have somebody that's married or have children it is a whole different thing. It doesn't work. It's unacceptable. No entertainment that – this would be harmful to the child. It's just unacceptable, and they didn't find out. Anybody with five dollars can do a background check on somebody and they didn't do it. Again, I think that that is something they're leaving to others to do when it's their responsibility to do it. But Taheed and Watashi had a child so they removed them from the competition. Interestingly, they kept shooting them. Right? So they didn't get rid of them completely. They kept them in the show and of course, you know, to have the producer call them into an office and tell them they were being kicked off the show, well, that makes for great TV, doesn't it? So what they're claiming is that the producers were aware before they got to the show that they had a child, that they said well, this will be great, we'll reveal it on the show, for ratings. The thing that you do have to watch out for with reality TV is

that, again, the producers aren't happy with reality. Sometimes reality is really boring, and sometimes it's not pretty, and sometimes it makes for really lousy television, and it takes a long time, because there's no script. To get what you want may take forever and you never know what you're going to get. So these people are spending lots of money, even though it's not as much as it would cost to make a sitcom or a drama, still a shitload of money and there are hundreds of people involved. They've got to get a good show. And it's not scripted and they don't know what they're going to get. Believe me, these producers are winging it from the time they get there. All they know is the concept and the first time they shot Survivor they did not know what they were going to get. The first time they shot Temptation Island they had no idea what they were going to get. That show was so screwed up from the beginning to the end with – they didn't know how many singles they were going to get. It was supposed to be fifteen. It wound up being twelve. One of the singles, after her date one night, simply woke up the next morning, believed that the producers had drugged her drink and quit the show and left and they never addressed that on the air. That was a total closterfuck *(?)*, that show, and yet it did really well coming back. Hopefully – the one danger with all of these shows is that somebody could get hurt. Producers don't give a damn. All they care about is money. That's all the networks care about. That's their bottom line. On the very first Survivor, which was shot in Sweden, the first person kicked off, threw himself in front of a train and killed himself. Obviously someone didn't do a background check on that person because they would have known that person didn't belong on the show. When Richard Hatch was arrested for child abuse, before the show had even aired, you can imagine what the people at CBS were thinking, because this was their winner. This would have killed the show. Again, he kind of got a raw deal out of that one, but that's what happens, all of a sudden these people become instant public figures, more famous than the Vice President of the United States or any world leader, and it's kind of cheesy fame, it's a cheesy fame like a Joey Buttafuco fame. It's a cheesy fame. You're not famous for anything wonderful that you did, you're just famous because a lot of people saw you and know your name. That's their new reality.

LJ: Exactly. That's pretty much all the questions that I had for you. Is there anything I didn't talk to you about or ask you that you wanted to touch on?

MS: I don't know. I think it's a great thing that these shows are on TV. I think variety is everything. It's something that's needed. There are way too many of these stupid sitcoms and these stupid dramas that they keep shoveling down people's throats. That's why fewer and fewer people are watching networks. The danger though is that they'll keep pushing the envelope, as they always do, as creative people are supposed to do and someone's going to get hurt. But that's their problem. That good?

LJ: That's great. Thank you so much.

MS: That's okay. If you need any more, you know where I am.

LJ: Thanks a lot. Take care. Goodbye.

(end of interview)

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lisa Anne Joniak was born in Springfield, Illinois, on July 24, 1972. The youngest of five children, Lisa grew up primarily in Palos Park, Illinois, a south-west suburb of Chicago. Lisa graduated from Carl Sandburg High School in 1990. Following high school, Lisa earned her bachelor's and master's degree in 1995 and 1997, respectively, from Northern Illinois University. In 1998, Lisa moved to Gainesville, Florida, to pursue her doctoral degree at the University of Florida. In August 2001, Lisa graduated from UF with her Ph.D. Currently, Lisa enjoys life as an Assistant Professor of Broadcasting at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, Florida.

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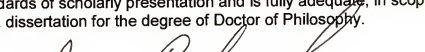

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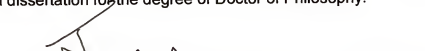

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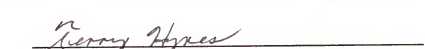
This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the College of journalism and Communications and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

August 2001



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